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Cairo, Paris see eye to eye

President Mubarak's visit to Paris has moved Egyptian-French relations to new heights and resulted in a call for an international conference to save the peace process. Ibrahim Nafie, in the French capital, writes

The outcome of President Hosni Mubarak's talks in Paris with French President Jacques Chirac was a joint statement calling for an international conference of "countries determined to save the peace" in the Middle East.

This conference, to which "the protagonists" would be invited at a later stage, "would maintain and confirm all the existing accords and principles" and would "give a new hope, new momentum, to the peace process," the statement said.

But saving the faltering peace, though a primary target of Mubarak's state visit that began on Monday, was not its only goal. High on the visit's agenda was greater economic cooperation and opening channels of dialogue between North and South. And with Egypt and France celebrating 200 years of cultural relations, Mubarak visited two rare exhibitions of Egyptian treasures.

The call for an international peace conference was issued at a time when regional peace-making faced its worst crisis since the Oslo Accords in 1993. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has rejected a proposal by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright for a 13.1 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank, throwing the peace process into jeopardy.

Mubarak spoke by telephone Tuesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to explain the Egyptian-French call for an international conference. Arafat, who accepted the American proposals, met with Albright in London on Monday, but there was no breakthrough.

"We, presidents of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the French Republic, express our extreme concern about the continuing deadlock in all aspects of the peace process in the Middle East," the joint statement said. "We are, in particular, seriously troubled by the lack of progress on the Palestinian track, despite the real efforts undertaken by the United States, which we supported as a step towards the relaunching of the peace process."

The two presidents welcomed the "positive reaction of the Palestinians to the latest American proposals" and made "an urgent appeal to the Israeli government to respond in a positive and constructive manner to these proposals."

Mubarak and Chirac said that "any additional delay in the resumption of the peace process can only lead to more frustration which, in turn, will inevitably lead to violence and instability as the latest developments have shown." They said that a "just, lasting and comprehensive peace" should be based on UN Security Council resolutions, "an exchange of land for peace and the realisation of the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people. In our opinion that should lead to the realisation of the right of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent state on the basis of their right to self-determination," they said.

The two presidents declared opposition to Israel's policy of establishing settlements in occupied territories and underlined the need for a resumption of talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, following talks with Mubarak on Tuesday, said that "France and Egypt cannot stand by and see this deterioration, let this impending catastrophe happen."

Jospin said the joint call for an international conference "demonstrates the readiness of our two countries to do anything to avoid the worst."

Mubarak said: "We hope for a more active and stronger French and European role to press upon Israel the necessity of respecting its commitments, to stick by its promises and not to put forward groundless pretexts for not doing so."

A Foreign Ministry official in Cairo also said that what is taking place now are "consultations, not preparations." The most plausible scenario, he said, is that the conference will include the United States and Russia, the co-sponsors of the peace process, France, the current chair of the European Union, Norway, the sponsor of the Oslo agreement, Jordan and Egypt. In a later stage, the Palestinians and Israel will be invited. As for Syria and Lebanon, it is uncertain whether they will be ready to take part.

"It must be made clear that we are not talking at all about Madrid Two," an official said, referring to the 1991 conference that brought the Arabs and Israelis together. "We are not ready to re-negotiate the terms of reference of the peace process. This conference is about dealing with the problem of Israeli intransigence."

No decision has been taken to date on the date and venue. Possible sites are Egypt, France, Norway and the United States.

Mubarak was accompanied on the three-day visit by 125 Egyptian businessmen, whose main concern was to reduce the trade deficit between the two countries, which is eight-to-one in favour of France. Addressing a meeting of Egyptian and French businessmen yesterday, Mubarak warned that the continued imbalance "would threaten our ability to receive such a large volume of imports in the future. Any move to reduce this deficit will serve the interests of both sides," he said.

A joint venture for the manufacture of buses and trucks was signed between Egypt's Ghabbour group and Renault. Other ventures were launched for the production of cement and the expansion of the Egyptian mobile telephone network, with Telecom's assistance. Plans for opening a non-profit French university in Cairo were finalised.

Mubarak's visit to the Ptolemaic and Fatimid exhibitions climaxed celebrations, titled "Egypt-France Common Horizons," marking 200 years of cultural relations.

Mubarak and Chirac, visiting the Glory of Alexandria exhibition at the Petit Palais on Tuesday, were shown 300 Ptolemaic artifacts. These include a 14-tonne colossus of Ptolemy I which was salvaged from the Mediterranean by a French archaeological team working in Alexandria. Also on display were two sphinxes, the torso of a king, part of the obelisk of Seti I, a red granite bust of Alexander the Great — all salvaged by Jean-Yves Empreure.

Yesterday Mubarak visited the Institute du Monde Arabe where 200 Fatimid treasures are exhibited. They include woodwork *mihrabs*, jewelery boxes inlaid with ivory, bronze statues, hexagonal marble stands, votive inscriptions, rock crystal lamps and golden dinars bearing the names of Fatimid Caliphs.





The obelisk that has graced the Place de la Concorde since 1836 was capped with a gilded pyramid to mark President Mubarak's state visit to France. Right, President Chirac greets Mubarak at the Elysée Palace on Monday *(photos: AFP)*

INSIDE

Viagra blues

The Ministry of Health put a damper on the excitement building up in Egypt when it refused to license Viagra, the first pill to fight male impotence, reports Fatemah Farag

Viagra: a small blue pill with a big reputation. It is making the news, lots of money and, allegedly, a great many men very happy. But before you start to snicker or line up for your share of the fun you might want to consider some warning signs, signs the Ministry of Health is taking very seriously.

"Our decision is that the drug will remain illegal until we have had the opportunity to undertake the necessary studies into its properties and side effects," explained Dr Gamila Moussa, under-secretary for drug affairs at the ministry, following the announcement of the refusal to license the drug on Monday.

Approved by the US Food and Drug Administration late last March, Viagra has become — according to published reports — the most popular medication ever to hit the American market, attracting more than 40,000 prescriptions per day. Predictably, black markets quickly sprouted beyond American borders. In Taipei one pill is reportedly selling for $100. In Akhmeem, Sohag, the cost is a more modest LE75 per pill, at which price it is dispensed "only to people I like since demand far exceeds supply," said an Akhmeem pharmacist, speaking on condition of anonymity.

According to Egyptian law, all imported medications must first be approved by the Ministry of Health which fixes the price of drugs and organises their distribution through the Egyptian Company for Medication. And while Viagra has never been formally approved it is, for now at least, effectively banned. Such action was necessary, Dr Moussa insists, because "the media is making a myth out of this drug. Any druggist who sells it, or any other unlicensed drug for that matter, will face fines and/or imprisonment. We will find out because we routinely undertake surprise checks of pharmacies." In fact, since Monday, reports in the local press regarding Viagra confiscation have become commonplace.

A pharmacist in an upper class Cairo neighbourhood claims he does not sell Viagra but adds that many customers have come into the drugstore and complained when they could not find the drug. "They tell me it is all over the papers and that they want it. The problem is people do not realise that it can have serious side effects and druggists who are selling it illegally are taking a risk with people's lives. A man could get a heart attack taking that stuff."

Similar criticism of media and popular reaction to the drug was made by Nadia Wassef, principal investigator on the FGM task force project "Investigating the link between male sexuality and female genital mutilation".

"There is a very sensationalist approach which stresses the sexual rather than the health aspect of the drug. Take for example the logo of the pill with a smile on its face — it is very misleading," she said.

But Pfizer, the company producing Viagra, is not complaining. Its shares have jumped 163 per cent, giving the pill its pet name: the billion dollar drug. And no surprise given that, in the US alone, the drug has an estimated 30 million potential consumers, men who experience "erectile dysfunction". And in Egypt a Qasr El-Aini study indicated that between 25-30 per cent of married men suffer from impotence — 2.5 million people all of whom could be potential Viagra users.

When you take into consideration the alternatives to Viagra it is easier to appreciate the frenzy. Popular medicines aside, the only remedies for impotence to date, as reported by *Time* magazine, include gel suppositories, injecting drugs directly into the base of the male organ, vacuum pumps and penile implants. Yet despite the unpleasant nature of such treatments they are heavily advertised in Egyptian papers.

But the appeal of Viagra appears to extend beyond the impotent and many commentators fear that it feeds directly into a culture of machismo, boosting male egos that are already dangerously overweight.

"For men [sexual performance] seems to mean a lot, everything — so all these men are going out of their minds trying to get their hands on the pill. On the other hand you have women who are perceived to be over-sexed and hence must be quietened down which is why you circumcise them," said Wassef.

A recent study by Kamran Ali, an anthropologist who undertook 15 months of fieldwork studying the concept of masculinity in Egypt reports that it is commonplace for men to use medication for the maintenance of erections.

At a popular market in Cairo *Amm* Abdel-Azim has dealt with these types of problems for years. Piled on the ground before him are packages of coloured herbs. "My stuff is cheap [50pt per package], it is natural and it is really good," smiles Abdel-Azim enthusiastically, giving me a "thumbs up" sign.

The seasoned vendor claims that aphrodisiacs are popular with men not because they are impotent but because life is tough and "these things" require an extra boost. His words echo the findings made by Ali who documented that men attributed poor sexual performance to poverty. The lack of energy-giving foods, combined with the belief that poor socio-economic conditions undercut their sexual appeal, led Ali to the conclusion that "poverty demasculises".

"Male sexuality is a big taboo and problems are well camouflaged," insists Wassef. Maybe, but for how long?







University President Ahmed Omar Hashem delivering his Friday speech on the *Nakba*; actors Gamil Rateb and Mohsena Tawfik, at the National Theatre

'A Palestinian state is unstoppable'



Marking 50 years of Palestinian dispossession, Egypt vowed unwavering support for the establishment of a Palestinian state

Arab-Israeli peace-making is facing its worst crisis ever, writes **Dina Ezzat**. Many Middle East officials and diplomats believe that there is hardly anything that can be done to get the peace process back on track as long as the current right-wing Israeli government remains in power.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa is a most concerned official. Having been involved in the process since it was launched by President Anwar El-Sadat in the late 1970s, Moussa now says that the process is "disintegrating," going as far as calling it "clinically dead." But in the same breath he insists that regardless of what happens in the short run, the time will come to declare the establishment of a Palestinian state. This is a cause, he often repeats, that will not be given up.

During a visit to London last Monday, Moussa spoke to the Association of the Palestinian Community to commemorate 50 years of Palestinian *shatat* (diaspora). "Let us resolve that, before the end of the 20th century, we will be celebrating the birth of the State of Palestine; a viable and independent state established by the people and on the land of Palestine," Moussa told an applauding audience.

The argument put forward by the foreign minister was that because of "Palestinian resilience" and the fact that Palestinian land is still there, despite all efforts to impose *faits accomplis*, the Palestinian people, together with their government, as represented in the Palestinian Authority, will have their homeland and declare their state.

"The reality is increasingly becoming universally recognised, even in Israel; more and more people have started to realise that it is unstoppable," Moussa affirmed.

He said that a Palestinian state is the inevitable outcome of the Madrid peace process and the Oslo agreements. This is why the present Israeli government "has shown much hostility towards the principles of the Madrid process and has sought with such determination to unravel the Oslo agreements," he added.

Parliament remembers *Al-Nakba*

The People's Assembly marked the 50th anniversary of the usurpation of Palestine. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

At a meeting of the People's Assembly's general committee to mark the 50th anniversary of the loss of Palestine to Israel, known to Arabs as *Al-Nakba*, Speaker Fathi Sorour said the founders of Israel managed to turn their dream into reality by sound internal organisation and by forging alliances with major powers.

After reviewing the history of the armed conflict between Arabs and Israelis on the land of Palestine, Sorour said the 1993 Oslo agreement was a turning point in the course of the conflict. "The Oslo agreement was the first document in which the leaders of Israel unequivocally recognised the Palestinian people," he said. However, Sorour accused the current Likud government of undermining the peace effort and the Oslo accords. He added that the struggle of the Palestinian people should have worldwide support.

Saturday's meeting included a large number of MPs, chairmen of the Assembly's and Shura Council's committees on Arab affairs, foreign relations and national security plus Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Jordanian diplomats. At the end of the meeting, two messages of support were sent to President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, hailing their struggle to achieve a comprehensive peace and regain the rights of the Palestinians.

Fathi Qozman, chairman of the Assembly's national security committee, urged closer coordination and cooperation between Arab armies "in preparation for possible developments.

"You are all aware that Israel will not restore Palestinian land easily and that the Likud government is undermining all chances of peace," Qozman said.

Mohamed Abdellah, chairman of the Assembly's foreign relations committee, argued that the Oslo agreement brought the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to a temporary halt. "This agreement was the first step toward the establishment of a Palestinian state," Abdellah said. He referred to some Israeli politicians, including former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who advocate the establishment of such a state.

Mohamed Said El-Daqaq, chairman of the Shura Council's Arab affairs committee, said there was a greater understanding now in Europe, the United States and even in Israel itself of Arab rights and the necessity of establishing a Palestinian state.

Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, said Egypt's support for Arafat was very important in order to strengthen the position of Palestinian negotiators. He argued that the Arabs had failed to regain their occupied lands because they depended on their numbers, while Israel relied on quality. "The Israeli citizen has a wide range of rights and capabilities," Mohieddin said. "The question now is: what are the rights and capabilities of the Arab citizen? We want to see real development in the Arab world, a development that is real enough to cut the Israeli state down to size."

Badr Hammam, an assistant to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, urged the Arabs to draw lessons from their long conflict with Israel in order to turn their dreams into reality. "It may take 50 or 100 years for the Arabs to realise their dream of regaining the land of Palestine, but this a very short period in the course of world history," Hammam said.

Egyptians mark 1948

Political parties and professional syndicates organised public rallies and a "Palestine Solidarity" week. **Amira Howeidy** was there

People arriving to attend last Thursday's opening of the "Palestine Solidarity Week" at the National Theatre were given a white candle each as well as a small Palestinian flag. The candles were lit and placed on a large bed of sand in a show of solidarity with the Palestinians on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Israel.

Inside the theatre, over 800 people, including actors, actresses, public figures, university professors and students, filled the seats. Actress Mohsena Tawfik sang Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab's patriotic song *Akhi, Gawaza Al-Zalemoun Al-Mada* (Brother, the despots have gone too far) which was met with loud applause and cheers. A university student later chanted Fairuz's famous "Jerusalem" song, which was followed by recitals of Palestinian resistance poetry. After observing a minute of silence in solidarity with the Palestinians, some shouted a few pro-Hamas slogans.

The Solidarity Week, organised by the Actors' Syndicate, drew large numbers last Thursday.

At the same time, a political rally was taking place at the downtown headquarters of the leftist Tagammu party, at which the Israeli flag was burned. "What was taken by force will be regained by force," chanted the audience, packed in the party's conference hall.

The audience included leaders and representatives of the Tagammu, Labour, Nasserist, Wafd and Liberal parties as well as the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions and the Arab Lawyers Federation. All voiced angry views, each from their own ideological perspective, on Israel's continuing aggression against Palestinians and Arabs throughout the past 50 years.

Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Nasserist party, argued that it was Israel, since its usurpation of Palestine, that had refused to interact positively with its Arab neighbours. "The Camp David peace accords [between Egypt and Israel] could not create a new or different reality because hostility is still there," he said. Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin said that despite Arab efforts, Israel, and not the Palestinians, "continues to possess the power and the state." Mohieddin pointed out that, "the Palestinian question will remain the crux of the struggle with Zionism. We can only revive the spirit of resistance." He then went on to detail a framework within which resistance could be realized. "The Arab peoples will have to pressure their governments to follow a different strategy [in dealing with Israel]. There should be a move to boycott Israel and support the Palestinian resistance in the occupied territories, the Syrians in the Golan Heights and the Lebanese resistance in the southern occupied zone."

At the end of the rally, representatives of the attending political parties issued a communiqué denouncing Israel's dispossession of the Palestinians. The communiqué also slammed the role played by the United States, which was described as "the main mover and protector of Zionism."

The following day, party leaders placed wreaths at the monument of the Unknown Soldier and then proceeded to Al-Azhar Mosque for the Friday noon prayers, which were transformed into another political rally. Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University, delivered a sermon urging the Arabs to unite. "We [Muslims] constitute one fifth of the world's population and we shall defeat the Jews because God promised us victory," he shouted from the pulpit's microphone.

Slogans such as "Palestine is Islamic and Arab," "death to Israel" and "open the door to *Jihad*" were shouted repeatedly. Dozens of worshipers then tried to march out of the mosque but were prevented by security forces which had surrounded the area.

On Tuesday, the Islamic-oriented Labour party held yet another rally "in solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people and to mark 50 years of Palestine usurpation."



For the children

One of the major successes of Cairo's IAA World Congress was the launching of an international campaign to help the children of the world. **Rehab Saad** sums up the congress' achievements

On the last day of the 36th Congress of the International Advertising Association (IAA), a campaign to help the children of the world was launched by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak along with Norman Vale, IAA director-general, and Barry Day, the IAA's creative director.

Mrs Mubarak was chosen by the IAA to serve as the honourary chairperson of the World Advisory Body of the programme, titled "Give a kid a hand".

"As you come to the close of the 36th IAA World Congress, and on the occasion of your 60th anniversary, I am proud and honoured to accept the honourary chair of your worldwide campaign to help the children of the world and to work towards a better future for all," Mrs Mubarak told the gathering. "When I knew of the IAA's efforts to launch a worldwide campaign to help the children of the world, a campaign that complements the efforts of UN organisations, I was extremely pleased in light of the diversity of involvement in this humanitarian issue."

Mrs Mubarak expressed her confidence that the program will succeed. "With the IAA's wealth of knowledge in integrated marketing communications and with the generous support of its members, the media, the advertisers, and the advertising professionals, we certainly have all the ingredients of success," she said.

The campaign, which targets children below the age of five, is Vale's brainchild. The idea, as he explained it during the ceremonies, is to address people's apathy in dealing with social problems. "Give a kid a hand", stressed Vale, is not about collecting money, but about getting people personally involved in humane efforts. From this concept evolved the slogan: "It's not your money, it's you we want."

Vale told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he feels that advertisers need to give the world something, and that they should use their business to improve society. "I hope that we can demonstrate all the discipline and skills of the industry for the common good of mankind. We've very often been criticised for commercialism, influencing people to pay. Westernising, spoiling culture and for maintaining high prices. I believe that this is a good opportunity to show that we have good moral sense and high ethical character and are very good communicators," Vale said.

A campaign manual will be sent to all IAA chapters in 59 countries along with the creative material and specific instructions on how to adapt the programme for their own markets. The manual will be translated in five languages, "so that our TV spots will be understood by well over 3 billion people," Vale explained.

Interaction sessions were among the big successes of the congress. Delegates were able to interact via satellite and the Internet with people from the four corners of the world: Britain, the United States, Austria and the Pyramids at Giza. At the Internet café in the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) as well as on computer screens throughout the world, people could watch the sessions live. According to IAA officials, this was a first in the IAA's history.

Among the important sessions was "Sunlight passage to the 21st century", which discussed the idea that ancient Egyptians were among the first civilisations to use interactive communications. Vivien Davies, curator of the Egyptian department at the British Museum, spoke via satellite about the ancient Egyptians in general, focusing on the secrets of the Rosetta stone. Live from the Giza Pyramids, Mohamed Saleh, director general of the Egyptian Museum, said that ancient Egypt was the first civilisation in the world to use cartoons. His slide show featured cartoons inscribed on the walls of temples. Some were meant for entertainment but others were political, criticising the government regime of the time.

One of the most interesting sessions which sought to prove that the ancient Egyptians were the first to use advertising was directed by Christo Kaftandjiev, an associate professor at Sofia University. Kaftandjiev attempted to explain to the IAA congress the concept of "hieroglyphic interaction with the post-modern world". He argued that symbols of ancient Egypt are being used in today's advertising. "For example," he said, "the basic characteristics of banks, from consumers' standpoints, are security and stability. These values provide the intersection between banks and the Pyramids, and that's why they are often used as a symbol in banks' ads."

The "interaction" exhibition, which included numerous international and Arab publishing houses and advertising agencies; was another achievement for the event's organisers.

For those who did not have time to go shopping in the old bazaars of Cairo, the Congress provided its own bazaar. The "Khan El-Khalili" bazaar provided guests with almost everything: silver and gold items, imitation Pharaonic statues, cotton wear, *galabiyas* and even spices and incense which the old khan is famous for.

The three gala dinners, which were held by the Lebanese chapter, MBC and the Saudi Research and Publishing Company at the Media Production City in Sixth of October City, the Pyramids area and the Citadel respectively, were another story. Each satisfied both the appetite and the spirit of the guests who enjoyed different menus representing different cuisines — oriental, Lebanese, Indian and Italian — as well as art shows in which several Egyptian and Arab artists took part.

"I have got nothing unsuccessful to report. We served a very successful event. This will probably be the largest registration we have had in a decade," said Vale.

"I was really impressed by the satellite communication. I believe that it took people a great effort in making it come through," said David Hanger, publisher of the *Economist* and senior vice-president of the IAA. He added that his home country of England will be hosting the 37th congress which will be held in the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre and Westminster Central Hall on Parliament Square. The theme will be "Beyond the cutting edge — the communications blueprint for the new millennium."

Unfinished business with Khartoum and Tehran

Egypt's relations with the Islamic regimes in Sudan and Iran continue to be shrouded in ambiguity. As **Dina Ezzat** reports, this pattern is not likely to change any time soon

Relations between Egypt, on the one hand, and Sudan and Iran, on the other, are not only cool but also controversial. Indications that these relations are improving emerge every now and then, only to dissipate shortly afterwards. Relations continue to oscillate between tension — that is kept under close control — and cautious optimism.

During the past few weeks, Cairo and Khartoum have issued statements and counter-statements — and taken actions and counter-actions — that reflect, in a subtle but clear way, the mutual dissatisfaction in both capitals with the readiness of the other side to improve relations.

The foreign ministers of the two countries spoke by telephone last week to discuss tighter regulations Egypt has imposed for granting entry visas to Sudanese nationals. Sudan complained of the security constraints and received assurances from Egypt that it was intent on improving bilateral relations while devoting due attention to its security interests.

The controversy over entry visas followed the failure of the two Nile Valley states to agree on terms for the handover of Egyptian property in Sudan that had been confiscated by the Khartoum government. This failure came as a blow to year-long attempts by the two sides to end the rift in their relations.

Both sides concede that although their political disputes cannot be resolved in a relatively short period of time, it is in their best interests to continue working on improving bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, there are reports that an Iranian political delegation may visit Cairo in the near future for talks with senior Egyptian officials. But, sources say, since the delegation will not be received by President Hosni Mubarak, a full resumption of diplomatic relations is unlikely to happen soon.

For Egypt, both Sudan and Iran are important: the first because it is the source of Nile water, and is strategically located along this country's southern border; the second because of its leverage in the political power play between Arabs and Israel, and its location in the Gulf where Egypt has strategic interests.

Egypt's relations with the two countries soured after the rise of Islamic regimes in both Tehran and Khartoum, in the late 1970s and early 1980s respectively. Diplomatic relations with Tehran were broken off and the post of Egyptian ambassador to Khartoum has been vacant since the early 1990s.

But during the past year, there were indications of some rapport with both capitals. There have been ups and downs.

Only a few days before the eruption of the Egypt-Sudan visa controversy, the foreign ministry issued a statement expressing dismay and frustration for the limited results achieved by an Egyptian delegation that visited Khartoum to work out a schedule for the restoration of confiscated Egyptian property.

The statement asserted Cairo's keenness to improve relations with Khartoum, but made it clear that for this to happen, the Khartoum government must hand the property back within a reasonable period of time.

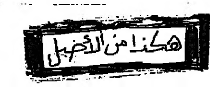
A Sudanese official told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Khartoum is also keen on improving relations with Cairo. He described the differences that surfaced during the Egyptian delegation's visit to Sudan as "procedural. This is a technical and not a political committee, and differences over the schedule can be resolved soon," the official said. Another source said that the same applies to the visa problem.

In the meantime, and ahead of the visit of the Iranian political delegation, an Iranian television crew came to Cairo earlier this month and video-taped interviews with some high Egyptian officials, including Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

"I think this is a good step," an Iranian source said. "If officials of the two countries are not meeting face-to-face, it is good that they hear each other talking to the media, so that they may understand better each other's positions. Indirectly, this will help build up confidence."

What complicates matters, however, is that there are circles within the Sudanese and Iranian governments that oppose improving relations with Egypt, a source said. These circles advocate the "export" of the Islamic revolution, and believe that Egypt is a potential target.

A similar split exists in Egyptian government circles. One group believes that improved relations with Sudan are necessary in order to secure Egypt's share of Nile waters as well as its southern border. The same group argues that it would be a great loss to forego the economic benefits of trade and investment with Iran as well as the leverage that may result from political cooperation. The other camp, although conceding that Egypt needs both Sudan and Iran, is apprehensive they may encourage the rise of an Islamic regime in this country.



هكذا من الأصل

Storm in a teacup?

Will a US bill on religious persecution spell trouble for US-Egyptian relations? Nevine Khalil examines the legislation and its possible consequences

The approval by the US House of Representatives of a bill that seeks to impose sanctions on countries that practise religious persecution, or tolerate it, has sparked controversy in both the US and Egypt.

Cairo has, however, kept its cool. According to Egyptian officials, it is only one lost battle in a series of many that may be won in the future. They added that the bill "does not target Egypt per se, but is part of an overall rising trend of conservatism in the US."

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act (FFRPA) was passed by an overwhelming majority of 375 members of the lower house of Congress last Thursday. Only 41 representatives opposed the bill.

Only Sudan is mentioned by name in the bill, after the names of nearly a dozen countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and China were removed before it was put to vote.

First introduced last year, the bill was promoted by religious conservatives and supported by a coalition of religious and human rights groups worldwide.

Meanwhile, a less stringent bill requiring the US government to investigate religious oppression was presented by Republican Senator Don Nickles, in the Senate. The Nickles Bill gives the administration more leverage in deciding when and where to impose sanctions.

President Bill Clinton's administration strongly opposes both bills, because it feels that such sanctions would greatly hinder US foreign policy by imposing punitive measures against strategically important states.

As a result of aggressive lobbying by the administration, the names of all states, except Sudan, were removed from the House bill. The Clinton administration feels that the bill would be counter-productive and that each case should be dealt with separately.

Cairo believes that the Senate is "more moderate" and any legislation it passes is bound to be reasonable. Members of the House of Representatives "tend to be more vocal and aggressive because they represent smaller constituencies," an Egyptian official said.

But a long road lies ahead before a law is enacted. After the Senate votes on the Nickles bill, both Houses have to meet and decide on a hybrid legislation on religious persecution. This procedure must be completed before the current 105th Congress concludes its sessions at the end of 1998. The president will then have the power to veto or shelve the bill.

If agreement is not reached the process will have to be re-started in both Houses at the beginning of the new congressional year.

The religious persecution bill imposes various sanctions against offending countries, including the restriction of exports, a ban on entry visas, cutting off US non-humanitarian aid and opposing loans by international financial institutions. The legislation would also establish a permanent office to monitor religious persecution and report to Congress regularly. The president would have the authority to waive aside sanctions when US national security interests are at stake, or if the suspension of sanctions "promotes the objectives of the act."

US officials believe that such legislation, in reality, could trigger discrimination against allegedly persecuted groups, thus doing more harm than good. Democratic Representative Alcee Hastings agrees. "The bill will not help those who suffer religious persecution. Religious minorities fear they will be blamed for any sanctions that result," he said.

Meanwhile, extremist Coptic groups in the US have become more vociferous and aggressive as differences between them and the Patriarch of the Coptic Church, Pope Shenouda III, escalate. "It was these groups that asked for Egypt to be mentioned by name in the bill," an informed source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "They just wanted to jump on the bandwagon when they heard that a law on religious persecution was being discussed in Congress."

Egyptian officials say that the extremist Coptic groups in the US "make false accusations that are not based on facts." They never cite any names, dates or places of incidents of persecution, one diplomat said. "We have to work very hard to counter these allegations by basically educating the American public and Congressmen that they are false," he added.

Meanwhile, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) said it was "deeply concerned" about allegations in the US relating to Egypt's national unity — an issue it described as "a sacred red line." In a statement issued earlier this week, AOHR said that the US "is not qualified to play the role of protector [since] Egyptian Copts are in no need of such protection."

AOHR said it was "unacceptable" to impose economic sanctions on the basis of alleged human rights violations, noting that "Israel, the state with the worst possible record in human rights violations, is the biggest receiver of US aid."

When the US legislation became news in Egypt, there was a public outcry as people of all political persuasions rallied behind the government. Copts, led by Pope Shenouda, political parties and the civil society vehemently deny that Christians are discriminated against, insisting that the US has no right to interfere in Egypt's domestic affairs.

The AOHR statement said that claims by "some Egyptian Copts in the Diaspora" are opposed by all Egyptians, especially their fellow Christians. "Copts [in Egypt] are the first to reject [US] protection," it said.

The AOHR, conceding that "problems and negative behaviour towards Egyptian Copts" exists said that these could be solved by "persistent efforts leading to the complete respect of human rights for all citizens."

The influential Council of Churches of New York recently visited Egypt and met with President Hosni Mubarak and other senior officials. Upon their return to the US, they gave a positive report on the condition of the Copts. "The Council is an esteemed body and they left with the correct impression that Copts were not being persecuted," a source said.

History slaughtered at the Citadel?



Bowing to pressure, the culture minister has put on hold a plan to rent out part of the Citadel grounds to build a hotel. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

Will it be possible to dine and wine or go shopping near the site of the famous — or infamous — 19th century massacre of the Mamelukes? And will it be possible to rent a hotel room with a breathtaking view of Saladin's Citadel?

A LE300-million hotel and shopping complex, among other attractions, was designed to do all of the above. But the scheme has been put on the back-burner by Culture Minister Farouk Hosni after it came under fire from parliamentarians and intellectuals alike. They complained that the project will set a precedent for using a historic site for commercial purposes.

Responding to criticism from parliament's culture and arts committee, Hosni said the plan will be frozen until committee members visit the site at the end of this month.

"The visit will determine whether the project will continue or be scrapped altogether," Salah El-Taroti, the committee's chairman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"It has never happened that historic sites were rented out for commercial use," Taroti said. "And this is taking place at a time when antiquities officials complain about encroachments on historic places. Then they do it themselves."

The original plan was for the Ministry of Culture to lease a 50,000 square metre plot of land, in an area commonly known as Bab El-Azab, on the Citadel's edge, to a private company to build a hotel and shopping complex.

The area, which has a large gate built in 1754 and flanked by two towers, includes more than 100 monuments dating back to the Mameluke and Ottoman periods. The plan also calls for the construction of a conference hall, an Islamic art museum and a restoration school.

Fouad Badrawi, a Wafdist MP, told the *Weekly*: "This is an archaeological site. You do not use your heritage to make business. You preserve your heritage."

The Citadel, originally built in 1176 by Saladin, who drove the Crusaders out of Jerusalem, is currently undergoing massive restoration.

Badrawi said the culture and arts committee of the Wafd Party has published a paper warning against the commercial use of archaeological sites.

A source at the Ministry of Culture said the plan dates back to 1989 when the Italian government offered to develop Bab El-Azab. The plan, which was to be carried out in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), won the approval of the council's permanent committee on Coptic and Islamic monuments in 1993.

"It was meant to breathe new life into an area that is historically rich but whose potential was never realised fully," Abdallah El-Attar, the committee's chairman, said.

Bab El-Azab, according to El-Attar, served as a military camp in the past but is used now as a garbage dump.

Poet and writer Farouk Gweida said the project won the blessing of the Culture Ministry, although it lacked the cabinet's approval.

"The project has been marketed and promoted internationally behind the government's back," Gweida wrote. "Can't we find another place to build shops and bazaars other than near the Citadel?"

Ayman Abdel-Moneim, who is supervising the project in cooperation with an Italian company, said that the cabinet's approval was not needed. "The project has already been approved by the SCA which includes renowned professors and experts," said Abdel-Moneim. "It only aims at making use of a large area that has been neglected for a very long time."

AUC throws out Rodinson's book

A biography of the Prophet Mohamed has been banned from AUC, reports Shaden Shehab

The American University in Cairo has dropped from its curricula a book entitled *Mohammed*, written by Maxime Rodinson, because of charges that it makes false allegations against the prophet of Islam. Copies of an English-language summary that were distributed to students have also been withdrawn following a decision taken by Higher Education Minister Moufid Shehab.

Shehab ordered the book thrown out after columnist Salah Montasser published an article in *Al-Ahram* on 13 May demanding that the book be banned.

"We cannot remain with folded arms when a university in Egypt, even if it is a foreign university, teaches Muslim students a book that insults their creed and Holy Book. This is neither acceptable nor justifiable." Montasser wrote that "freedom of education does not mean that thousands of books are ignored in favour of a book that insults Islam." Montasser reproduced excerpts from the book to show that it does injustice to the religion.

The mufti of the republic also published an article in the Arabic-language press, providing documentation refuting Rodinson's allegations. Moreover, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, grand imam of Al-Azhar, suggested that a law be enacted to empower Al-Azhar, the world's leading Islamic institution, to examine all books dealing with Islam before they are circulated in Egypt. "It is imperative to promulgate this law in order to uphold Islam and its tenets," said Tantawi.

Shehab told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that as soon as he read Montasser's column, he decided that the book should not be taught or circulated at AUC and ordered that copies be withdrawn from students. "Not only did AUC respond positively," Shehab said, "but its president, Frank Vandiver, paid me a visit to convey the university's apologies for an unintentional, individual error as well as assurances that AUC would never harbour the intention of directing insults at Islam."

A statement issued by AUC said: "With reference to Mr Salah Montasser's daily column on Wednesday, 13 May in *Al-Ahram* newspaper, the American University in Cairo has responded to official requests and acted to remove the book *Mohammed* by the French author Maxime Rodinson. The volume has been available in Egypt since its publication in the early 1970s."

Shehab said that his decision was based on the fact that "it is the constitutional duty of the Ministry of Higher Education to supervise university education," be it public or private. Shehab explained that all universities have the right to choose the curricula that are taught to students and the professors who teach them. And, he added, "it is up to the professor and his conscience to choose the books that he will use in teaching his course. It is very difficult to interfere with the thinking of professors."

On the other hand, Shehab said that if students are displeased with what they are being taught, then they have the right to complain to the university's management. "But this rarely happens," he added.

Shehab said the AUC professor "obviously had no bad intentions. He certainly was not trying to force the students to embrace the ideas that are contained in the book." Shehab conceded that the book has been in circulation in Egypt for the past 15 years and taught at AUC for about seven years. "As far as the ministry is concerned, the whole matter is closed," he said.

AUC sources said the university's library had four copies of the book, which have been withdrawn from circulation. It was on the reading list of a political science course in the early 1970s and a history course in the early 1990s, the same course the book was being studied on in this semester.

A source close to the professor said he invited his students to submit critical reviews of the book's content. "Students were required to criticise the book from whatever perspective they wished. The professor certainly did not praise the book and did not express a personal opinion. He even suggested other titles written by Muslim scholars so that the students might be exposed to ideas other than those the book advocates," the source said.

According to the same AUC source, the professor has great respect for Islam and would defend it, whenever necessary. The source added that the professor had been involved, in his home country, in many battles defending Islam and Muslims against racism and media vilification of Islam.

The professor has the support of many of his students. One of them, a Saudi Arabian, told the *Weekly* that the professor, while assigning the book to students, said that "it is not an Islamic book and may prove to be provocative and offending, so it will be easy for you to criticise. He provided us with the titles of Islamic references, so that we could build up a good argument against the book." The professor told the students that "he did not care if they tore Rodinson apart as long as they put forward a good argument," the Saudi student said.

Another source, however, said that the problem began when a student complained about the book to a friend, who is an alumnus. The friend, along with 46 other alumni, wrote a petition to the dean of the school of humanities and social sciences, requesting that "corrective action" be taken.

A copy of the petition was sent to Montasser.

New evidence in favour of Aida

Nurse Aida Noureddin, under a death sentence for murder, may yet be proven innocent. Fatemah Farag reports

Once stigmatised by the press as the "angel of death," nurse Aida Noureddin has been resurrected by national and opposition newspapers alike as a victim of a substandard health system. The change of attitude followed protests by fellow nurses and others in Alexandria against the death sentence she received for allegedly killing patient Abdel-Qader Ibrahim.

New evidence has been dug up by one of Aida's new lawyers, Amer Abu-Heif, who submitted an urgent appeal to the prosecutor's office, requesting that new witnesses be questioned. The prosecutor turned down the request on the grounds that the case now was before the Court of Cassation. Undeterred, Abu-Heif submitted a second complaint, accusing Dr Adel Eissa, professor of brain surgery at the Alexandria University Hospital, of gross negligence of duty that caused the death of another patient, Mohamed El-Sabbagh. Eissa allegedly authorised one of his associates, who is not a hospital doctor, to operate on El-Sabbagh. The result was El-Sabbagh's death.

Through the use of hospital statistics, Abu-Heif proved that while Aida was in jail seven deaths took place from 1 January to 4 April 1998 at the neurology ward of the Alexandria University Hospital as a result of respiratory failure — the cause of Ibrahim's death.

Abu-Heif used two outstanding examples to prove the state of negligence and chaos prevailing at the hospital. The first case is the death of El-Sabbagh who underwent surgery for a brain tumour on 27 December. El-Sabbagh died two days later as a result of a brain haemorrhage. However, his death would not have been news if it had not been for the complaint of a hospital doctor who said that an outsider performed the surgery, although the doctor was free at the time. The second is the case of Karima Rizq, who also suffered a brain tumour and died on 16 January of respiratory failure. Despite the fact that her family requested an autopsy, it was not done and questions regarding the cause of death remain pending.

These cases connect to a medical report published as a document in a recent book on the Aida trial. The report provides evidence that Ibrahim was already suffering partial respiratory paralysis two weeks before he actually died. Consequently, evidence that Aida killed him by administering a muscle-relaxing drug cannot be conclusive.

Abu-Heif is also producing new witnesses. "He went to the people who occupied beds near Ibrahim's bed in the emergency ward," explained Mohamed Noureddin, Aida's brother, to *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The witnesses questioned by the court were from the emergency ward generally and were not close to Ibrahim's bed and hence were not adequate. These new witnesses swore by the Holy Qur'an that Aida had not been near Ibrahim before he died and that his condition was very bad."

Further, the Alexandria prosecutor's office called in three doctors working at the neurology section for questioning last month. However, Adel Eid — Aida's sole lawyer during the trial and until recently — played down the importance of these developments. "These are all irrelevant to the case," claimed Eid. "All this alleged new evidence has nothing to do with the case. The judges of the Court of Cassation will only look at the papers in the dossier in front of them."

Although Aida's family still supports Eid and has asked him to continue with the case in addition to five new lawyers, there are complaints regarding how the case was handled from the beginning. "There were many issues that should have been brought up like her being moved from one police station to another for no legal reason, the abuse and then the details of what happens in the ward, of which she informed Eid. Aida said she wanted to confront witnesses and the court with these things and Eid said that he would take care of them and then he didn't," Mohamed Noureddin said. He also said that additional new evidence would be disclosed at the right time.

Despite the widespread support, Mohamed Noureddin reports that his sister's morale is low. "I visited her last week and we were not allowed to have a private meeting. It has to be through the wire mesh and until today she is kept in solitary confinement. It is as if they are trying to keep her away from anybody, so that she cannot say anything," he said.

The deadline for the Court of Cassation to take a decision is 25 May. "I feel like my sister is next to me," said Mohamed Noureddin emotionally. "I have great faith she will return to me soon ... with her pride and honour intact."

Disposing of a health problem

A pilot project to get rid of hazardous hospital waste will soon be launched in Cairo. Sherine Nasr investigates

If Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Atwa's prediction is correct, Cairo's high-risk hospital wastes will soon no longer be treated as ordinary household garbage. Atwa is head of a health committee formed by the Cairo governorate to tackle the problem. The governorate has commissioned a major German company that will be in charge of collecting, sorting out and disposing of hospital wastes in Heliopolis, Nasr City and Abbassiya.

"If the experiment succeeds, it will be applied to other parts of Greater Cairo," Governor Abdel-Rehim Shehata said.

The three districts have a considerable number of hospitals and private clinics. "We found it easier to establish a standard disposal management system in the three areas because they are close to each other," said Magdi Allam, head of the Greater Cairo chapter of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA).

Dangerous as they are, hospital wastes have thus far been left to public service companies to handle. "These companies have no experience in dealing with hospital wastes and, consequently, have treated them as ordinary garbage," said Gihad Abul-Atta, assistant professor of environmental medicine at Cairo University.

Hazardous 'garbage' from hospitals includes blood transfusion kits, dressings and used cotton, syringes, scalpels and blades. Body tissue, chemicals and drugs can also pose a major health risk.

According to Abul-Atta 40 per cent of hospital waste is infectious.

The overall volume of the waste is obviously huge. "Cairo has at least 3,500 hospitals, almost one-third of all hospitals nationwide," said Allam. To these should be added the waste generated by the small clinics, now common in every district, where minor operations are performed.

Wastes are dumped at one of two major disposal sites in El-Moqattam and Ain El-Seira. "The procedure can have a detrimental effect on people's health in those areas," said Abul-Atta, adding that no matter how small the amount of toxic material, it is still capable of infecting an entire area.

"The way that waste is dealt with is a tragedy," said Allam. "In advanced nations, hospital waste is given as much attention as nuclear waste."

In an attempt to facilitate the German company's task, the governorate has already allocated land along the Cairo-Suez highway, where waste will be sorted out and sterilised.

It seems likely that hospitals will be more than willing to deal with the new company. Every hospital will now be required to establish a waste disposal management system or face punishment under environment laws. "This is a prerequisite for renewing a hospital's licence," Allam said. Moreover, he added, if an infection results from failure to dispose of waste, those responsible are subject to punishment under the Penal Code.

The German company will deal with wastes using the state-of-the-art disposal technique of ray sterilisation.

At present, only a small number of hospitals have their own incinerators, including El-Salam International and El-Qasr El-Aini. The majority lack the facility. "Incinerators usually produce zero emissions and the ashes left are less than 20 per cent of the total volume of the wastes," said Allam.

In some cases, hazardous and non-hazardous wastes are burnt in the open. "Burning results in the emission of hydrocarbons which cause cancer and physical deformities," said Abul-Atta.

Meanwhile, two health-care management schemes have been launched, with the assistance of the EEAA, to install incinerators at hospitals run by Cairo University and the Ministry of Health. Using German technology, the incinerators will be manufactured locally.

"We aim to provide hospital staff with training on how to separate waste at the source, the only way to minimise the cost of disposal," said Abul-Atta.

"Such efforts may eventually solve one of the most serious environmental problems that has unjustifiably been dealt with too leniently. They will definitely result in better health conditions for Cairo's residents," said Allam.

Four militants killed in shootout with police

FOUR suspected Islamist militants, described by police as members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, were killed by security forces in a one-hour gunbattle on Monday at a small village near Mallawi in the southern province of Minya, reports **Mona El-Nahhas**.

One member of the group surrendered while a sixth, identified as Gamal Mahmoud Farghali, escaped. Police were combing nearby plantations in search of the fugitive.

According to an Interior Ministry statement, a civilian who was passing by was killed by the militants' fire while a policeman from the Central Security Forces was wounded in the shoulder during the exchange.

The killed militants included Emad Rushdi Amin, described as the provincial Gama'a commander and the mastermind of all terrorist attacks that have been staged in Minya since 1992. The other three dead militants, described as members of the Gama'a's military wing, were identified as Seoudi Ahmed Sayed, Ahmed Mahmoud Abdella and Shehata Mohamed Shehata. They were said to have taken part in several assassinations and attempted assassinations. The name of the militant who surrendered was not disclosed.

The last terrorist act committed by the group was an attack last March on a police patrol car carrying a police officer and four policemen in the Beni Mazar district. All the five policemen were killed while the militants escaped to Mallawi where they took refuge in a plantation.

Tipped about the location of their hideout, security forces encircled the area on Monday and demanded that they surrender. The militants responded by opening fire, prompting police to return fire.

Inside the hideout, police found four Russian-made automatic rifles, ammunition and papers containing "important" information about the Gama'a.

During the past two months, security forces have attacked two militant hideouts in southern Egypt, killing eight suspects.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Ghosts of '48

Al-Nakba commemorations in the West Bank and Gaza last week led to the worst clashes in two years between Israelis and Palestinians. **Graham Usher** reports from Jerusalem on the events of bloody Thursday when 10 Palestinians were killed

In preparing for last week's *Al-Nakba* commemorations, the Palestinian authority (PA) had wanted to achieve two aims. One was to mobilise "one million" Palestinians in assemblies and marches throughout the Occupied Territories in mourning for the loss of Palestine in 1948. The second aim was to keep the gatherings as peaceful as possible, preserving the *Al-Nakba* anniversary as "a day for the masses and not for unrest", in the words of Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member and Fatah leader, Abbas Zaki. The PA failed on both counts.

Although thousands did attend the commemorations, the turnout was a good deal less than one million — a sign perhaps of the growing disenchantment between the PA and the people it purports to represent. In Gaza particularly, the *Al-Nakba* events fell victim to factionalism before they began, with Hamas refusing to participate in any assemblies in protest at the PA's continuing incarceration of its members, including Hamas' Gaza spokesman, Aziz Rantisi. As for "peaceful protests", these are virtually impossible in the Occupied Territories, though the blame for this can hardly be laid at the door of the PA.

Typically, the most violent confrontations occurred in the besieged Gaza Strip. The PA had intended Gaza to host the showcase event of *Al-Nakba* commemorations — a 26 kilometre long march stretching from Rafah in the south to Beit Hanoun in the north. Eyewitnesses say the march was peaceful until late morning, when small skirmishes broke out between Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers near the Jewish settlements of Gush Qatif and Moraj. But "the kids were far away from the soldiers. At no point were the soldiers or settlements in any kind of danger," said Khalil Shahin, a field worker with the Gaza based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). The army opened fire with live ammunition, killing one Palestinian near Moraj and turning skirmishes into violent confrontations which spread from Gush Qatif in the south to Gaza's northern Erez checkpoint.

By the end of the day — reports the PCHR — four Palestinians had been shot dead in Gaza, and 71 wounded. The PCHR also allege that the army used snipers — a claim reinforced by the fact that, of the injured, 46 were hit by live ammunition, and 52 were maimed in their upper bodies (a clear indicator of "precise fire"). Of the dead, one was a PA male nurse, Zalem Al-Waheidi, killed by four bullets to the heart, head and hand, after tending to wounded demonstrators at the Erez checkpoint. A 45-year-old refugee from Jabalyia camp, Al-Waheidi, leaves behind a wife and 13 children.

There was trouble in the West Bank too, though less ferocious than in Gaza. Confrontations broke out in Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin and Ramallah, where one Palestinian, Ismail Shehadeh, was pronounced clinically dead after being hit in the head by a rubber coated steel bullet. There were also clashes in East Jerusalem, with mounted Israeli Border Police charging into crowds in Salah Al-Din Street, and Palestinian youths responding by trashing passing Israeli buses and torching at least one Israeli car. In East Jerusalem and Hebron, the clashes continued over the weekend, with 16 Palestinians being injured in Hebron, including a 13-year-old boy.

Altogether, *Al-Nakba* commemorations caused the worst violence in the Occupied Territories since the military confrontations in September 1996, when 80 Palestinians were killed and 1,200 were injured in protests against Israel's decision to open a tunnel beside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's occupied Old City. But, if the mood then was celebratory, now the dominant Palestinian sense is increasingly one of the futility of such sacrifices, given the reality of their lives under 'self-rule", and the present morbid state of the peace process.

Despite two meetings with Secretary of State Madeline Albright and one with special envoy Dennis Ross, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu returned to Israel on Monday with nothing to report other than a categorical denial that he had agreed to the American proposal of 13.1 per cent second redeployment in the West Bank. "Several things have been reported, such as my agreement to a 13 per cent withdrawal, which is not true," he told a press conference in Jerusalem.

It was a line echoed by Yasser Arafat, after his meeting with Albright in London on the same day. "Unfortunately, Mr Netanyahu has not offered anything tangible to Mrs Albright," he said, diplomatically. Israeli press reports say the current sticking point is that Netanyahu will only agree to a 13.1 per cent redeployment (however it is packaged) on condition that the third redeployment is cancelled or derogated to a joint Palestinian-Israeli committee. According to PA cabinet secretary, Ahmad Abdel-Rahman, "the Palestinian side is unable to accept anything less than the US proposals," which, he says, include a 13.1 per cent second redeployment now, and the commitment to carry out a third redeployment later in the year.



Marking the 50th anniversary of *Al-Nakba*, bloody clashes swept Gaza and the West Bank. Above, Israeli soldiers beat young Palestinian protesters in Jerusalem. Below, a Palestinian mourner shouts anti-Israeli slogans as the coffin of Zalem Al-Waheidi, a PA male nurse, is carried by the gate of Al-[illegible] Mosque in Gaza. (photos: AFP)

White House keels before Netanyhu's US offensive

Netanyahu said a firm 'no' to the Clinton administration's proposals to revive the peace process. But as **Thomas Gorguissian** reports from Washington, the right-wing premier received a big 'yes' from the American Congress and the pro-Israel lobby

No sooner had Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu returned to Israel following a week long US visit than he put paid to news reports that Israel had agreed to the 13 per cent West Bank redeployment proposed by the Clinton administration. In London for the G-8 summit, State Department spokesman James Rubin also denied any progress and said, "I cannot say that we have a breakthrough. On the contrary, we are working very hard to overcome the differences."

And in Washington, the message was the same. Martin Indyk, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, told a forum sponsored by the powerful pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), "There are still gaps that remain to be closed and still difficult going."

Clinton administration officials, apparently wishing to avoid a public confrontation with Israel, are mainly keeping silent. President Bill Clinton, at a news conference held in London, said, "I think they [both sides] are in a period where anything we say publicly will increase the chances that we will fail." It was reported that already some "refinements" have been introduced to the American plan, and that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was trying to sell the changes to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in London on Monday.

There has been a decided change in the Clinton administration's tone with respect to Netanyahu's defiance; no longer is there talk of an "ultimatum" to which the Israeli government is obliged to respond. The shift could well be explained by the success the Israeli premier met with during his US visit in lobbying support in Congress and among the American Jewish community. Nevertheless, some believe that Washington may still "reexamine its approach" to the peace process, as Secretary Albright warned two weeks ago.

Netanyahu's week in Washington was an exercise in defiance of the White House. The Israeli prime minister, in scores of speeches and interviews, focused on Israel's "security" concerns and doubts regarding Palestinian intentions. Almost everywhere he went, he harped on the catch-phrase: "Peace without security is meaningless. Peace without security is a sham."

In his speech before AIPAC's 2,000 delegates from all 50 states, Netanyahu said that "the first commitment they [the Palestinians] must fulfil is that they must abolish the Palestinian National Charter...This is the test of peace." His words were met with thunderous applause.

Speaking of Israel's need to retain "defensive buffers", the Israeli premier said: "This is what will keep the peace. This is what has brought the peace. If I had to say, what is the day, the one day, that peace became possible in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbours, I would say that day was June 12th, 1967. Because on that day, Israel pushed the border from the suburbs of Tel Aviv to the banks of the Jordan, across a stone wall a thousand metres high, the mountains of Samaria and Judea and made peace possible because it made successful conquest impossible."

Netanyahu was scornful of the Palestinian demand of independent statehood. "We seek a solution that will give the people who are living on that wall, the Palestinians, the ability to govern their lives but not any ability to threaten our life."

But former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres voiced an opposing view while in Washington on the same day to receive an honorary degree from American University. He told his audience that Israel should recognise a Palestinian state. "We don't have the moral right to dominate another people... They're entitled to their own lives, their own respect and independence," he said.

Netanyahu's other favourite theme, besides security and the rejection of a Palestinian state, was how "Israel contributed enormously to the United States and our civilisation" and that without Israel, the Soviet Union could have dominated Middle Eastern oil fields and sea routes.

He said several times during his US tour that Israel's existence changed world history, and helped seal the fate of the former Soviet Union. On this theme, Netanyahu told the AIPAC gathering: "Today we are faced by a menace that is no less dangerous than communism. That is the menace of Islamic fundamentalism, of fanaticism that is rearing a new and ugly head. And we have to fight and resist it. And again, Israel is the best ally that the West and the United States and democracy have in this region."

While in Washington, Netanyahu reaffirmed his warning that the declaration of a Palestinian state, which Arafat has declared would take place no later than 1999, would be a "unilateral act" in violation of the Oslo Accords. His warning found a receptive audience in Congress, as expressed in the words of Congressional leaders on both sides of the House. Speaker Newt Gingrich went to the extent of describing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as "the agent for the Palestinians". Other politicians and columnists did not miss the chance to bash First Lady, Hillary Clinton, for her recent statement that Palestinians were entitled to a state of their own.

The AIPAC Policy Conference, held in Washington during the weekend, provided ample proof of the extent of unreserved Congressional support for Netanyahu's intransigent policies. A letter to President Clinton, promoted by AIPAC and signed by 81 senators and over 220 congressmen, warned the Clinton administration not to exert pressure on Netanyahu and Israel.

A report published by the *New York Times* on AIPAC disclosed that on 29 March, 1998, "a strategy session" was held at the residence of the Israeli ambassador in Washington, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, and was attended by senior Israeli diplomats and AIPAC leaders. The meeting's purpose was, as described, "to coordinate lobbying efforts". The AIPAC-backed petition drive led to a public confrontation between the Congress and the White House, one which Israel and its American friends seem to have won hands down.

Upon his arrival at Dallas International Airport, Netanyahu told the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharanoth*, "With all friendship and appreciation to America, an Israeli prime minister should know how to say 'no' to the United States," and added "I am going to say 'no' to the United States, because as prime minister you should know how to do something other than stand on the White House lawn with everyone applauding."

Not only did Netanyahu say 'no' to the US administration, he was applauded, in Washington, for having done so.

Turning up the heat on Lebanon

Israel, this week, was once again resorting to its favoured means of negotiating: gunfire. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Ten members of the Palestinian Fatah-Intifada Movement were killed and 22 others injured in the deadliest Israeli attack against Palestinians in Lebanon in over two years. The attack in the heart of the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley is being interpreted by observers here as a form of pressure on the Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians.

A spokesman for the group in Beirut was quoted as saying the attack may have been aimed at putting pressure on Beirut and Damascus to accept Israel's conditional withdrawal offer and to warn against using Palestinians in anti-Israeli operations in south Lebanon.

Media reports said Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu may have been trying to send a message to Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad to rein in guerrillas fighting Israeli troops occupying a border strip in south Lebanon. Damascus is the main power broker in Lebanon.

Observers also said Netanyahu may have been trying to provoke the Palestinians to retaliate in order to give Israel an added justification to reject US peace proposals on a West Bank troop pullback.

The unprovoked Israeli assault came two days before a meeting between Netanyahu and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Their talks centered on Israel's offer to withdraw from south Lebanon on condition the Beirut government grants it security guarantees. The proposal has been rejected outright by Lebanon and Syria.

Four Israeli warplanes fired 12 missiles directly into the Fatah-Intifada base in the night attack. The raids targeted the group's training centre in Taanayel, next to the Beirut-Damascus highway and only a few kilometres away from the Syrian border.

The Damascus-based Fatah-Intifada, a splinter group led by former Fatah Colonel Abu Moussa — who quit Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah group — opposes the PLO-Israeli peace deal.

The last major Israeli raid on Fatah-Intifada bases was in July 1996, after the group claimed responsibility for an attack in the occupied West Bank that killed three Israeli soldiers and wounded two. There were no casualties in that raid.

Fatah-Intifada officials were quoted as saying the raid targeted graduating cadets and may have been aimed at killing the faction's leader.

"I was not at the camp at the time," Abu Moussa said in a statement. "This camp comprises our administrative positions that service our front-line positions in south Lebanon."

Security sources here said the raids were well-planned and the Israelis acted on accurate intelligence. "The base is not occupied constantly. The Israelis knew they were there. The raids were a provocation. The group is not active in the south," one source said.

"We promise our martyrs, all our martyrs and our nation, that we will make the enemy pay for this aggression," the group said in a statement. "Israel used internationally banned weapons in this barbarous raid... We will not let this crime go unpunished."

The American ambassador to Lebanon, Richard Jones, described the raids as a "serious message" but did not elaborate. "People should wonder why there were Palestinian camps there and what they were doing," Jones told reporters.

His comments came under fire by some Lebanese officials. Former prime minister, and current parliament member, Selim Hoss, said Palestinians are located in every area in the country. "They are here because they were forced out of their homes with the blessing of great powers like the United States," Hoss said. "We would like Washington to tell us why Israel uses US made weapons to kill innocent civilians in south Lebanon."

The Hizbullah resistance movement also denounced Jones' remarks, calling on the government to put a stop to the ambassador's interference. "His statements prove US aggression against our people. His country caused the diaspora of Palestinians," the group said.

The Arab League said the attack on the Palestinian base proved Israel was not serious in its offer to withdraw from south Lebanon. The Israeli premier said in his talks with Annan that the offer to leave Lebanese territories is genuine. "We made it clear to the secretary-general that as far as we are concerned, we are ready to implement 425... We added no conditions and no requirements for a peace treaty," Netanyahu said.

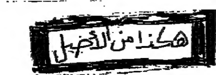
Lebanon has made clear it welcomes an Israeli pullback, but only if it's unconditional. Beirut says it is under no obligation to provide Israel with security arrangements in the absence of a peace treaty and a comprehensive settlement.

"We are against renegotiating the terms of Resolution 425," House Speaker Nabih Berri said. "We are more determined than ever to maintain unity in the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks."

Annan has decided to create a committee of top aides to assess Israel's proposal. He has already created a low-key committee to assess the repercussions of an Israeli withdrawal on UNIFIL — the UN peacekeeping force deployed in south Lebanon. But the UN chief is well aware that without a comprehensive settlement, peace cannot be ensured.

"The secretary-general feels that there can't be peace in the region without Syria and other nations in the region (being) involved," his spokesman Fred Eckhard said. "Security arrangements for the withdrawal will take time, and it is too early to say if there is a role for Annan or for UNIFIL before an agreement is achieved between Israel and Lebanon on a withdrawal."

The attack on the Palestinian base serves as a stark reminder that Lebanon, yet again, will have to pay the price for the deadlock in the Middle East peace process. Observers are warning of further violent pressure on Beirut if no progress is achieved on the Palestinian-Israeli peace track.



Boycotting the settlements

The European Commission recommended that the 15-member European Union block all imports from Israel that originate in the Occupied Territories. **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, talked to the spokesman of the leftist Israeli peace group which launched the boycott campaign

Invoking the so-called "rule of origin", the EC said in a statement issued last week that imports from Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights are in violation of the preferential trade agreements signed between the EU and Israel, "since these territories do not form part of the State of Israel under public partners, taking around 40 per cent of all Israel's exports."

In a swift riposte, Israel's Foreign Ministry warned the EU to "weigh its moves carefully" before taking "unilateral steps that would harm the peace process". In the meantime, Israel has been thinking of taking a few unilateral steps of its own. According to a report in the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu conveyed a message to the EU that should it impose customs duties on Israeli imports from the Occupied Territories, the Israeli government "will ban the entry of Palestinian workers into Israel".

Jewish settler groups also reacted fiercely to the EC's recommendation, stressing that the idea of a boycott of settlement goods was raised first in Israel by "a tiny body on the left".

The "tiny body" is Gush Shalom (the Israeli Peace Bloc). Following the establishment of a new Jewish settlement at Ras Al-Amud in occupied East Jerusalem last September, Gush Shalom launched a consumer boycott campaign and circulated a "blacklist" of more than 100 items produced by Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.

In the following interview with Gush Shalom's spokesman, Adam Keller, he talks about the boycott campaign inside Israel and its relationship to the EC's recommendation on the "rule of origin".

What is the aim of the boycott campaign?
There are several aims. First, we want to weaken the settlements economically. Second, we want to delegitimise the settlers in the eyes of the wider Israeli public, conveying the message that this public is not prepared to fight another war on their behalf. Third, we want to alert Israeli entrepreneurs who invest in the settlements due to the large government subsidies the settlers receive.

Most of these entrepreneurs have no ideological commitment to the settlements, but invest in them for concrete economic considerations. The boycott campaign is a counter-incentive. It warns the entrepreneur that if he invests in settlements he may get government subsidies, but he will lose his domestic market.

How effective is the boycott?
It is difficult to assess. We know that thousands of people have taken our blacklist and that thousands more have visited our Web site where the list is available. But we don't know if any settlement has been hurt economically as a direct result of the boycott.

Since the campaign started, one settlement factory in annexed East Jerusalem has gone bankrupt. But I cannot claim whether this is because of the boycott or the recession.

Do you have any idea what percentage of Israel's exports originate in the Occupied Territories?
No. These figures are not released. Indeed, they are deliberately obscured by the Israeli government. All government statistics treat Israel and the Occupied Territories as a single economic unit. They are never broken down into regions. It is difficult to work out which exports originate from the Galilee let alone from the Occupied Territories.

So we only have a general idea. But our assessment is that the number of agricultural exports originating in the Occupied Territories is quite significant. It could be as high as 20-30 per cent of all Israel's agricultural exports to Europe, and is probably higher in sectors such as flowers and tomatoes.

Last week, the European Commission (EC) recommended that member states withdraw all trade privileges on Israeli exports that originate in occupied territories, whether from the settlements or from the Palestinian areas. Was there any coordination between Gush Shalom's boycott campaign and the EC's recommendation?
Coordination is a very strong word. But, yes, we have contacts with the European Union (EU), both in Brussels and through their representatives in Israel.

Our campaign is directed primarily to Israeli citizens inside Israel. We nevertheless view the EC's recommendation to be very positive. We believe it is not only the EU's right but its duty, to impose the rule of origin in its trade agreements with Israel. It is perhaps the most important contribution Europe could make to the peace process. If Israeli entrepreneurs realise they will lose the usual customs exemptions on their exports to Europe, they will think twice about investing in settlements.

Our understanding is that the EC's recommendation is a decision "in principle" to impose the rule of origin. It is not yet a decision in practice. Implementation, I understand, is dependent on the outcome of the current negotiations between the US and Israel, with Britain coordinating with the Americans on behalf of the EU. If Netanyahu accepts the US proposal on the second West Bank redeployment, I expect the recommendation will stay at the level of principle. If he doesn't accept the US proposal — and the negotiations break down completely — I expect implementation.

The Israeli Peace Movement has been accused of using foreign powers to exert pressure on an Israeli government which you may not like, but which was fairly elected at the ballot box. How do you counter this charge?
There has been a long debate inside the Peace Movement over whether it is legitimate to exhort foreign governments to pressure Israel. And, of course, there is a natural reluctance to do this. The Peace Movement, no less than any other Israeli group or party, wants Israel to be an independent sovereign state. But our conclusion is that the outside world is already involved in the internal politics of Israel.

When the US or EU refuse to pressure Netanyahu, they are taking a political decision. When the EU accepts uncritically every Israeli export that carries a "Made in Israel" stamp — even when it is fully aware that some of these exports originate in the Occupied Territories (*Al-Ahram Weekly*: and sometimes other countries such as orange juice made in Brazil) — it is taking a political decision. In other words, not enforcing the rule of origin on Israeli exports is no less a political decision than enforcing it.

How united is the Peace Movement behind this strategy?
The decision to invite foreign pressure on Israel is the policy of Gush Shalom. In April — on the eve of his trip to Israel — a letter was sent to British prime minister and the current EU president, Tony Blair, as well as to President Clinton. It was signed by Peace Now (the largest peace movement in Israel), and every other Israeli peace group, including Gush Shalom. It does not call for "pressure" on Israel, but for "firm action by the US, the EU and the United Nations" to save the peace process. What is "firm action" if not "pressure"?

In other words, were the EU to impose the rule of origin in its trade agreements with Israel, I doubt whether any element of the Israeli Peace Movement would object to it.

Iraq lobbies for world support

Iraqi officials toured European and African countries to mobilise support for lifting the eight-year-old UN sanctions. But **Rasha Saad** finds there is little hope of a breakthrough

Last week, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz and Foreign Minister Said El-Sahaf toured European, Arab and African countries in a diplomatic bid to gain more world support for their demand to lift the nearly eight-year-old UN economic sanctions.

Aziz went to Paris where he met with French President Jacques Chirac and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He also went to Italy for talks with Italian Prime Minister Romani Prudi, leaders of political parties and the pope. He will leave Italy for Belgium later this week.

While Aziz was in Europe, El-Sahaf started an Arab and African tour. He visited Jordan, Tunisia and Kenya and is also scheduled to meet officials from Gabon and Gambia. The three African countries are current non-permanent members of the 15-nation UN Security Council. Iraq said that it will send other top envoys to China and Russia to make sure that its point of view is well understood by all members of the Security Council, hoping that this might change America's and Britain's policy toward Iraq.

Iraq insists that it has fully complied with all Security Council resolutions demanding the destruction of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Thus, Iraq says, maintaining the sanctions imposed after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait is unjustified.

Nabil Nejm, Iraq's representative at the Arab League, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "it became clear that Richard Butler [chief of the United Nations Special Commission team monitoring the destruction of Iraqi weapons] is a tool in the hands of the US administration." He said that the US "has been seeking by all means available to maintain the sanctions indefinitely and, accordingly, it uses UNSCOM to mislead the Security Council and the international community by claiming that Iraq still hides weapons of mass destruction."

Aziz, in statements made recently, also criticised Butler's reports. He compared Butler's latest report to the final last report presented by Ralph Ekeus, former head of the UN inspection team, adding that Butler's reports gave a dimmer view. "In his last report, Ekeus stated that what is clandestine in the Iraqi programmes is not much. Now, after a year of work, Butler says that what is left is still a lot, bringing us to the zero point."

The sanctions imposed by the UN cannot be lifted until UNSCOM certifies the dismantling of all Iraqi nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles.

After the Security Council decided to renew the sanctions earlier this month, Iraq warned that failure to lift the embargo would lead to serious consequences. Baghdad did not clarify what kind of action it might take.

According to Iraqi Health Minister Omid Medhat, nearly 5,000 children under the age of five died in March as a result of the sanctions. The children are among almost 15,000 people to die from "embargo-related causes" such as malnutrition and lack of medicine. The World Health Organisation expressed alarm last year over what it called a virtual collapse of the health system in Iraq.

Meanwhile, the reported near closure of Iraq's nuclear file, which was announced by the Security Council last week, did not bring joy to Iraqi officials or people. The Security Council announced that the other two files — chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles — remain far from closed.

In a compromise reached by US and Russian diplomats, the Security Council decided to consider scaling back nuclear inspections in Iraq if Baghdad provides answers about the status of its clandestine research programme by July. The Security Council is expected to announce the closure of the nuclear file in October when a "status report" from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirms that Iraq has satisfactorily responded to all outstanding questions concerning its nuclear programme.

Russia, supported by France and China, had pressed for an immediate decision to scale back intrusive monitoring after the IAEA informed the Security Council last month that it was now able to account for Iraq's clandestine nuclear programme. But Washington had been opposed to any Council decisions before the next IAEA report in October.

But according to Nejm, "the US does not want to close the nuclear file, fearing this might lead to an end to the sanctions. It seeks to maintain the sanctions to serve its strategic interests in the region. It seeks to maintain the financial benefits it gains from its stay in the Gulf and, at the same time, maintains the status quo for the benefit of Israel."



Iraqi children waiting for food in front of a government distribution centre in Baghdad earlier this week. Nearly 5,000 children under five and almost 8,000 other Iraqis died in March alone for reasons linked to the UN economic sanctions slapped on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait *(photo: AFP)*

Countdown to Baidoa

Somali leaders assured the world that there has been no change of heart over the national reconciliation conference due to take place within 90 days, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Key Somali leaders met in Hotel Sahafi in Mogadishu on 15 May to discuss the convening of the national reconciliation conference scheduled to take place within three months in the central Somali town of Baidoa.

The assembled leaders of the National Coordination Committee (NCC), a body of clan and faction leaders who met in Cairo in December 1997, are the closest thing to a central authority in Somalia. The country, with a population of 10 million, has not had any central government since the overthrow of the late Somali president, Mohamed Siad Barre, in 1991. The NCC has emerged as the only credible alternative to the chaotic situation created in the aftermath of Barre's demise.

Egypt, working in close conjunction with the NCC, and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) — a grouping of seven East African countries — has spearheaded the Somali reconciliation process. IGAD delegated Ethiopia to oversee the Somali reconciliation process, but Egypt has played a key role in bringing Somali factional leaders together. Last December, 26 Somali factional leaders signed a power-sharing agreement in Cairo.

But the reconciliation process has been tortuously slow.

The Baidoa conference has been postponed several times in the past over factional in-fighting, but this time the main reasons for any possible delay seem to be logistical and financial. The costs for hosting the conference are estimated at $4.5 million.

"The reasons we could not make progress this time were the unusually heavy seasonal rains and there are also some logistical and financial problems," the co-chairman of the conference, Hussein Farah Aidid, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The heavy rains of the last monsoon season in the past few months disrupted transport and communications throughout Somalia."

Aidid also cited other "serious obstacles" that still stand in the way of the Baidoa conference. "The most important is the enmity that exists both inside Somalia and among certain sections of the Somali diaspora in Europe, America and the Gulf who are vehemently opposed to the NCC's reconciliation conference," he said. "But, in spite of all these problems, we are optimistic about the possibility of convening the Baidoa reconciliation conference within the next 90 days."

The Somali ambassador to Egypt, Abdallah Hassan Mahmoud, also told the *Weekly* that he was confident that the conference will take place within the next three months. He said that "behind the scenes, the various factional leaders are working on a national agenda for lasting peace."

Neighbouring Ethiopia has, however, been somewhat critical of the NCC. Ethiopian government sources say that the NCC is not the collective voice of all Somalis and that important Somali political groups were left out of the NCC.

Two of the most vociferous anti-NCC leaders are General Omer Haji Mohamed, leader of the Somali National Front (SNF), and his rival, General Aden Abdullahi Nur Gabyow, leader of the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), a of former ally of Ali Mahdi Mohamed's. The SPM is an alliance of two powerful Darod clans, the Majerten and the Marehan. However, the two clans have been engaged in fierce fighting for the control of the southern port of Kismayo. General Gabyow's deputy, General Mohamed Said Hirsi, popularly known as "General Morgan," who is also the mayor of Kismayo, is one of the most fierce opponents of the NCC. His forces have clashed with Aidid's forces in Kismayo, and the battle for the southern port has cast a long shadow of doubt on the prospects for a meaningful outcome from the Baidoa conference.

Gabyow has long pointed an accusing finger at Aidid and the Egyptian government for instigating violence in Kismayo, but both the Egyptian authorities and Aidid deny any involvement in the war-torn southern Somali port. Gabyow and Colonel Abdullah Yusuf Ahmed stormed out of the Cairo peace and reconciliation talks and later announced from Addis Ababa their rejection of the Cairo declaration.

Both Morgan and Gabyow belong to the powerful Darod tribe which feels marginalised by the political dominance of the Hawiye tribe and especially by the new legitimacy the Cairo declaration gave Somalia's two most powerful Hawiye leaders — Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed, the leader of the National Salvation Council (NSC).

Another important topic of discussion at the Hotel Sahafi meeting was the establishment of an administration for the Benadir region in which the Somali capital Mogadishu is located. The major developments on the Benadir region's agenda include the opening of the port and the airport at the earliest possible date, perhaps in the next few days.

There is mounting pressure on the participants, especially the two main Somali leaders who between them control Mogadishu — the NSC's Mohamed and Aidid, who inherited the chairmanship of the United Somali Congress-Somali National Alliance (USC-SNA) from his late father General Mohamed Farah Aidid. While Mohamed controls southern Mogadishu, Aidid controls the capital's northern suburbs.

Mohamed has tried in vain to re-unite the NSC, a grouping of 26 factions set up in January 1997 after talks in Sidere, a mountain resort town on the outskirts of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. The USC-SNA is dominated by members of the Habr-Gedir clan of the Hawiye tribe — Somalia's largest tribal confederation.

However, hopes for uniting Somalis also received a big boost after it was resolved at the Hotel Sahafi meeting that a high-level delegation headed by the two co-chairmen of the NCC and including prominent members of the coordination committee tour the war-torn regions of Bay and Bakol, 10 days after officially launching the administrative institutions of the Benadir region.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

In the chains of theocracy

In this essay on state and society in Israel, 50 years after its founding, **Tikva Honig-Parnass** traces the roots of the new populist authoritarianism emerging under Netanyahu. Based on the marriage of Zionist colonialism and aggressive clericalism, the new regime is the logical expression of the Zionist project

Fifty years after its establishment on the foundations of the Palestinian *Al-Nakba* (catastrophe), the Jewish state is still in the midst of a continuous process: that of realising the goals of the Zionist colonialist enterprise. From the start, the Zionist movement set itself the goal of establishing an exclusivist-Jewish state in the territory of historical Palestine, by dispossessing the Palestinians of their land and their homeland. This goal was only partially achieved in 1948, and was completed in 1967 with the conquest of all of Palestine.

Nevertheless, the Oslo Accords were needed so that world public opinion, Arab states and the Palestinians themselves could legitimate the Zionists' preferred "solution to the Palestinian problem": continued Israeli control over the territories occupied in '67, both by direct annexation (including, but by no means limited to, the settlements and bypass roads), and by means of a small Palestinian client state on Bantustan lines in areas with high concentrations of the Palestinian population. The emerging apartheid system here is thus designed to meet the ideological requirements shared by all streams of Zionism, including the Zionist Labour movement: separation to establish exclusive Jewish sovereignty.

COLONIALISM: On its 50th anniversary, the colonialist policies of the state of Israel are still in force, and are also applied to those Palestinians who remained within Israeli borders after the expulsion of most of the Palestinian people from their homeland in 1948. As is the case in the territories occupied in '67, within the green line the attack continues on what little land remains in Palestinian hands after 93 per cent was declared "state land", i.e. land on which only Jews are permitted to settle. Similarly, the discriminatory planning and development policies instituted by all previous Israeli governments remain in force: to severely restrict construction and building in the "recognised" Arab towns and villages, and to destroy the approximately 180 "unrecognised" ones altogether by refusing to grant building permits or to allow such elementary infrastructure as water and electricity, and such basic services as education and health care.



The Zionist movement itself, and the colonialism of the state of Israel, is designed first and foremost to serve the regional interests of Western imperialism. Currently it is the US's interest in controlling the oil resources of the Middle East within a neo-liberal framework that is being introduced to the region, and is beginning to be implemented in Israel. The policies of a "free" economy are destroying the remnants of the universal welfare state within Israel, leading to fierce unemployment rates and the pauperisation of broad sectors of the working class and petite bourgeoisie. In the 50th year of a state designed, ostensibly, to provide prosperity to all the Jewish people who settled in it, the gaps between rich and poor are among the widest in the Western world.

The pauperisation taking place now is not the fruit of Netanyahu's policies alone. It is the result of the cumulative effects of long-standing policies implemented by the Zionist Labour movement, whose continuous hegemony in the pre-state Zionist movement and in the state of Israel was interrupted only in 1977, when the Likud won the elections. The subsequent Labour governments, like the opposition Labour Party today, were not in principle any different from the Likud with regard to the policies of privatisation and a "free" economy, and the neo-liberal ideology that accompanies them.

In parallel to the convergence of Labour and Likud around neo-liberalism's economic policies, the differences between their respective programmes for the final solution under Oslo are becoming ever more blurred. The essence of the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan of March 1996, which Arafat recently announced is acceptable to him, will leave most of the Israeli settlements in place; on the territory that remains (not more than 50 per cent of the West Bank) a Bantustan state will be established, with its capital in the village of Abu Dis (adjacent to Jerusalem). This programme is now accepted (although not explicitly) by both Netanyahu and Labour.

The main difference, however, under Netanyahu's reign is the nature of the political regime, which is designed to mobilise support for neo-liberalism: the destruction of the old political parties and the old elites, the tendency to blur the distinctions between the three branches of the government, the refusal to cooperate with the Knesset and the criticism of the Supreme Court: these authoritarian features of Netanyahu's government are paving the way to a populist regime based on a direct, charismatic connection between the leader and the "people". Such a regime is reminiscent of the contemporary South American-style neo-Peronism, whose Israeli version is characterised by the close union of Zionist colonialism and aggressive clericalism.

In place of traditional party politics, Netanyahu conducts a "sectoral politics" consisting of the cultivation and bribery of the political representatives of various groups, including the Russian immigrants, ultra-Orthodox groups and the Shas movement, which sponsors a network of community health and education services. This sectoral bribery serves neo-liberalism, as it both reflects the ideological preference for private charity over the principle of the universal rights of the citizen and is economically advantageous: the cost of sectoral bribery is less than that of financing a universal welfare policy.

THE SECULAR-RELIGIOUS RIFT: Granting power to the Orthodox establishment is not a novelty introduced by the Netanyahu government, but rather one of the structural features of the state of Israel since its establishment. During the years of Labour Party rule, however, there was a coordinated division of labour between the state and the Orthodox establishment in the form of the Supreme Rabbinate, initiated and supported by the nationalist-religious party within the Orthodox community (as opposed to the various ultra-Orthodox groups, who relied on their own religious authorities, and who were rather alienated from Zionism and the state).

The active cooperation of the nationalist-religious sector with Zionism and the state led the rabbinical establishment to adopt a more moderate position. This prevented them from interfering with secular life beyond the borders of the agreement known as the "status quo", and allowed them to play the role of mediator between the state and the Orthodox. The power of the Chief Rabbinate was weakened, however, as the young generation of the nationalist-religious sector turned to both ultra-Orthodoxy and extremist Zionism, a process which began after the '67 War. These young people now look to the heads of *yeshivoth* (religious seminaries) in the Occupied Territories and Israel as an alternative source of authority. This process, together with the ongoing "orthodoxisation" of the once secular extreme right, has led to the increasingly arrogant interference in secularist life by ultra-orthodox circles, with the Chief Rabbinate trailing behind.

The sharpening of the religious-secular rift was recently revealed during the main ceremony commemorating the 50th year of the state, which was characterised by militarist and religious symbols intended to mark the "victory of Zionism": the modern dance Anaphasa, by the Bat Sheva Ballet Troupe, was censored at the last moment under pressure from a middle-ranking Orthodox official (the deputy mayor of Jerusalem), because the dancers stripped down to short pants as the hymn "God Is One in Heaven and Earth" (from the Passover ritual) was heard. The troupe refused the compromise solution suggested by President Weizman — to wear long underwear — and cancelled their appearance. None of the other distinguished Israeli artists who were scheduled to perform joined the dancers, and only the next day did dozens of artists organise a militant demonstration. It was the first demonstration ever organised by Israeli artists against the ongoing violations of the right to free artistic or political expression in either Israel or the territories occupied in '67. The demonstrators pledged to continue the struggle against "religious coercion" and for "artistic freedom".

The mass media hastened to describe these events as the beginning of a "cultural war" and an indication of "the greatest rift in Israeli society, one which threatens its unity". But even a superficial examination of the discourse which developed around this incident throws light on the ideological chains that secular Israelis place on themselves, and which prevent them from developing a principled and systematic struggle against the role of religion. These chains are their deep commitment to Zionism and the Jewish state, which from its beginning has been half theocratic.

The most senior artists and writers, Israeli cultural heroes, the majority of whom support and celebrate the Oslo "solution", have repeatedly emphasised, in the debate which followed the incident, that they are struggling for "a Jewish and Zionist-democratic state, without religious coercion". Their discourse, however, has not reached the point of speaking in the name of universal rights, including freedom of expression in the areas of the press and politics; nor have they mentioned the rights of more than two million Palestinians in the territories occupied in '67 and the discrimination against them in Israel. After all, such an attitude would have forced them to identify the essential contradiction between the Jewish-Zionist state and secular liberal democracy.

ZIONISM AND RELIGION: As Professor Zeev Sternhall of Hebrew University indicates, the conceptual-ideological framework in which Zionism operates has been shaped by the organic, tribal nationalism of "blood and soil" which developed in eastern and central Europe as the antithesis to the liberal nationalism with values rooted in the notions of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

This organic nationalism defined national belonging not according to political-legal criteria, but on cultural, ethnic, and religious bases — which could easily be perceived as reflecting biological or racial uniqueness. The individual is not perceived as an intrinsic entity or value, but as an integral part, regardless of personal choice, of the national unit, to which he or she owes absolute loyalty. The Labour Zionist movement, in addition to this "organic nationalism", also adopted national socialism in its Israeli version, known as "constructive socialism". This variant of socialism in the service of the nation required the subjugation of social and economic demands and the interests of the working class to "national aims".

Mobilising the working class to build the capitalist economy of the Zionist state-in-the-making was one of its "national aims". Building an egalitarian society was not among the goals of the leaders of the Labour movement. They were satisfied with existence of a system of services, such as health and education, which would prevent "excessive" inequality from undermining the foundations of national unity.

Religion was always a central component of national identity for organic nationalists. The centrality of the Bible in Zionism, however, helped make the religious dimension of Zionism even stronger than in other radical national movements. The Bible was used by Zionism not only as a means of cultivating national unity, but also as a source for legitimation of the Zionist claim of exclusive rights to all of Palestine.

As Baruch Kimmerling, professor of sociology at the Hebrew University, claims, "from the beginning, the Zionist project was made captive by its choice of Palestine as its target territory for colonisation and as the place for building its exclusive Jewish state. Neither the nation nor its culture could be built successfully apart from the religious context. This has been so even when its prophets, priests, builders and fighters saw themselves as completely secular."

Thus, Zionism preserved religious myths and symbols among its central symbols, including the cardinal "commandment" of Zionism: immigration to Palestine ("Eretz Israel"). The biblical connection to the land and the connection between the Bible and present-day life in the "old-new land" were strongly emphasised, both in the pre-state secular Jewish community (in which one used to learn the Bible six days a week) and in the state of Israel. Moreover, "the nucleus of the state's symbols remain today Jewish-religious. The rest is but a thin veneer of what only appears to be secularism [...] All the civic symbols and essentially the entire collective identity became subservient to religion, and Zionism itself turned into a sort of Jewish religion, incorporating civic elements as well."

This was the basis for the support of the leaders of the Labour Party (not just the Likud) for the settlements in the '67 Occupied Territories. They had inherited from the founders of Zionism the belief in the exclusive Jewish claim to Palestine as the ethical and moral basis for Jewish national existence. On the other hand, the '67 occupation necessitated a renewed and even more unequivocal religious legitimation. The heretofore small and marginal groups of religious Zionists became of central importance: the colonising and fighting pioneer vanguard, marching before the Zionist camp.

As Kimmerling states: "The settler with the *kipah* (skullcap) on his head and submachine gun in his hands is the most authentic representative of the hard core of their collective identity, whether Israelis want it to be or not. It cannot even be said that this is a distortion of Zionism, but rather that it is its logical expression, carried to the point of absurdity."

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ARABS: The notion of an exclusive Jewish state is built on the identity between nation and religion accepted by Zionism. Three fundamental laws enacted in the first years of the state's establishment, and based on the religious definition of the "national" collective, were meant to ensure exclusive Jewish sovereignty, given the continuing presence of Palestinians within the borders of the state, even after 1948.

The first two of these laws are the Law of Return (1950) and the Law of Citizenship (1952), which allow any Jew to immigrate to Israel and to automatically become a citizen, while at the same time, deprive all Palestinian refugees outside the borders of the state of the possibility of returning to their homes. The third basic law, the World Zionist Organisation-Jewish Agency (Status) Law (the "WZO Law"), ensures that Jews, in actual practice, enjoy preference over the Palestinian citizens of the state in all matters pertaining to land ownership and budgetary allocations for building and development. The WZO Law does this in a most cunning and hypocritical way: it authorises the various Zionist bodies, founded in the early 1900s, to function in Israel as quasi-governmental entities, in order to further advance the goals of the Zionist movement. They were assigned the functions of maintenance and support of cultural, educational and welfare activities, as well as the work of developing land, building projects in the existing Jewish communities and the establishment of new Jewish localities.

The religious definition of citizenship in the state of Israel, on which these discriminatory laws are based, violate the norms of modern nation-states, in which citizenship is generally defined in universal terms of political allegiance. The state of Israel is not defined as a state of all its citizens, but rather as the state of all the Jewish people throughout the world. In other words, the right to "membership" in the state, with all the rights that it entitles one to enjoy, is determined by the religious criterion of religious affiliation.

Two additional laws ensure the perpetuation of discrimination against non-Jewish citizens: the Amendment to the Basic Law: The Knesset (1985), provision 7(A), and provision 5(1) of the Law of Political Parties (1992). According to the Israeli Supreme Court's interpretation of these laws, a political party platform which calls upon the state of Israel to provide full and equal rights to Palestinian citizens, and/or challenges the Jewish character of the state, might find that it is disqualified from running in the national elections.

DEFECTIVE DEMOCRACY: Inevitably, however, the "Jewishness" of the state, which "justified" the denial of Palestinians as full citizens, boomeranged and denied a substantial part of basic civil rights to the Jews as well, both secular and religious.

Thus, the Orthodox establishment and the Chief Rabbinate were given control of the delineation of the national-collective borders which determine who is entitled to full membership in the Jewish state (an individual born to a Jewish mother or a convert in accordance with the definition of Orthodox Jewish religious law). This was done by means of absorbing religious personal status law as the law of the state and by assigning exclusive jurisdiction in this area to the rabbinate and its courts.

In other words, the legal and judicial system that relates to marriage, divorce and even burial, and which is based mainly on the Orthodox interpretation of the religious law, was assigned to the religious courts, and is not under the full control of the state. Moreover, the incorporation of the Jewish religious laws into the corpus of state legislation (particularly in the area of personal status) confers on the Orthodox establishment the authority to enforce them on the Jewish citizens (equivalent powers have been given to Muslim, Christian and Druze courts to rule the personal lives of the state's Palestinian citizens). And indeed, in "the only democracy in the Middle East", civil marriages are not available to the citizenry to this day.

Of course, it is women who are the most discriminated against in accordance with religious law. Thus, for example, a Jewish woman cannot even obtain a divorce without the consent of her husband, even if he beats her, or is in prison or insane — or if he has been missing for years but is not known to be dead.

It was not "religious coercion", however, that turned Israel into a half-theocratic state. This was made possible by the above-mentioned "status quo" arrangement, which was proposed to the Orthodox party, Agudat Israel, by the secular leader of the Zionist movement, David Ben Gurion, in June 1947, five months before the United Nations vote approving the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian states. According to this arrangement, the religious and Orthodox parties were promised that, in the Jewish state which was about to be established, the Sabbath and laws of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) would be enforced. The Zionist movement also accepted the authority of the Orthodox Jewish establishment over all legislation having to do with birth, marriage, divorce and burial. In return the Orthodox, who until then had fiercely rejected Zionism, accepted the Zionist leadership as a representative of the Jewish people, came to terms with the state, and even signed the Declaration of Independence and participated with the Zionist religious party in the first government.

The violation of citizens' freedom of conscience in general, and that of women in particular, inherent in the Israeli laws of marriage and divorce never particularly bothered the leaders of the secular Zionist parties, including those of the Zionist left, because of their indifference to and even contempt for civil and women's rights. Even now, as in the past, they are prepared to sacrifice full, universal civil rights, especially women's rights, on the altar of tribal unity around the fragile "status quo".

The delay in enacting a secular constitution has been one of the main mechanisms perpetuating the suffocating sentence the secular Zionists have imposed upon themselves. A constitution would ensure the implementation of the promise made in Israel's Declaration of Independence to provide equal rights to all its citizens "without regard to gender, race or religion".

In the first days of the state, and despite a promise contained in the Declaration of Independence, the coalition headed by Mapa'i, the predecessor of the Labour Party, decided not to enact a constitution immediately, but instead to rely on a gradual enactment of basic laws — without committing themselves to completing them within a definite time period. Thus, until 1992, not even one basic law which relates to the issue which is the heart and rationale of any constitution — namely the defence of the basic rights of minorities and individuals — was enacted.

The basic law designed to deal with this subject, the "Human Rights Law", was introduced in the Knesset, but got bogged down for years in various committees until, under the pressure of the religious parties, it was split into several separate basic laws. Only two of these have been enacted till now (both in 1992): the Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation (1992) and the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Freedom (1992), which is considered a mini-bill of rights by Israeli legal scholars. However, it lacks any clear clause guaranteeing equality of rights to all citizens, and any clauses explicitly protecting freedom of the press, expression and the right to demonstrate — which are the foundations of democracy.

Moreover, the Human Dignity and Freedom Law explicitly declares that its aim is to anchor "the values of the state as a Jewish and democratic state". Thus, on its face, the law entrenches the superiority of the Jewish majority and ignores the Arab-Palestinian citizens in Israel. However, this superior status, which is based on the legal and ideological definition of Israel as a Jewish state, is also responsible for the denial of the basic rights of secular Jews as well. The interpretation of the term "Jewish state" by Justice Aharon Barak, a secular Zionist thought of as representing the "liberal" position within the Supreme Court, locates his views very close to the religious perception of the Bible and tradition as the sovereign authority on the life of the Jews.

"[The] Jewish State is, therefore, the state of the Jewish people... It is a state in which every Jew has the right to return... It is a state of which the language is Hebrew, and most of its holidays represent its national rebirth... A Jewish state is a state that developed a Jewish culture, Jewish education and a loving Jewish people... A Jewish state is also a state where the Jewish Law fulfills a significant role... A Jewish state is a state in which the values of Israel, the Torah, Jewish heritage and the values of the Jewish *halacha* [religious law] are the bases of its values."

Thus, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Palestinian *Nakba*, Israeli society finds itself paying the price of its commitment to the ongoing Zionist colonial project, in its new Oslo form. It needs, perhaps now more than ever, religious legitimation for the "exclusive historic right" of the Jewish nation to all of Palestine.

As long as it continues to apply religious criteria to determine which members of society are entitled to full citizenship rights in the Zionist state, however, the Jewishness of the state will continue to generate chains of clerical control that prevent the realisation of full rights for the Israelis themselves.

Therefore, the opposition expressed by broad secular circles to "religious coercion" appears pathetic: their commitment to the Jewish-Zionist state — and thus their collective identity, which is religious in essence — distorts their very humanity when it comes to all that concerns the Palestinians. This prevents them from realising their own full civil rights, and freeing themselves from the chains of religion.

The writer is the editor of News from Within, *published by the Alternative Information Centre, Jerusalem/Bethlehem.*

Translated from Hebrew by **Yochanan Lorwin**



'Yes, we want peace with the Palestinians, but no, there was nothing wrong with what we had to do in 1948': this seems to be the gist of much of the writing of Israel's new historians. **Edward Said**, back from a Paris seminar on the topic, discusses the profound contradiction, bordering on schizophrenia, which makes the new historians reluctant to draw the inevitable conclusions from their own evidence



Years of dispossession

New history, old ideas

The French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* together with the *Revue d'etudes palestiniennes*, a quarterly journal published in Paris by the Institute of Palestine Studies, held a conference last week which I attended and participated in. Although it was announced as the first time that the so-called "new" Israeli historians and their Palestinian counterparts had exchanged ideas in public, it was actually the third or *fourth time*; yet what made the Paris meeting so novel was that this was certainly the first time that a prolonged exchange between them was possible.

On the Palestinian side there were Elie Sambar, Nur Masalha and myself; on the Israeli side Benni Morris, Ilan Pappe, Itamar Rabinowitch (who is not really a new historian, but a former Labour Party adviser, Israeli ambassador to the United States, professor of history at Tel Aviv University, and an expert on Syria, but whose views seem to be changing), and finally, Zeev Sternhell, an Israeli historian of right-wing European mass movements, professor at the Hebrew University, author of a very important recent book on the myths of Israeli society (the main ones of which — that it is a liberal, socialist, democratic state — he demolished completely in an extraordinarily detailed analysis of its illiberal, quasi-fascist, and profoundly anti-socialist character as evidenced by the Labour Party generally, and the Histadrut in particular).

Because it was not well-advertised, *the conference* attracted rather small audiences on the whole, but because of the quality of the material presented and the fact that sessions went for several hours, it was a very valuable exercise, despite the unevenness of some of the contributions. One very powerful impression I had was that whereas the Israeli participants — who were by no means of the same political persuasion — often spoke of the need for detachment, critical distance, and reflective calm as important for historical study, the Palestinian side was much more urgent, more severe and even emotional in its insistence on the need for new history. The reason is of course that Israel, and consequently most Israelis, are the dominant party in the conflict: they hold all the territory, have all the military power, and can therefore take the time, and have the luxury to sit back and let the debate unfold calmly. Only Ilan Pape, an avowed socialist and anti-Zionist historian at Haifa University, was open in his espousal of the Palestinian point of view, and, in my opinion, provided the most iconoclastic and brilliant of the Israeli interventions. For the others in varying degree, Zionism was seen as a necessity for Jews. I was surprised, for instance, when Sternhell during the final session admitted that a grave injustice was committed against the Palestinians, and that the essence of Zionism was that it was a movement for conquest, then went on to say that it was a "necessary" conquest.

One of the most remarkable things about the Israelis, again except for Pappe, is the profound contradiction, bordering on schizophrenia, that informs their work. Benni Morris, for example, ten years ago wrote the most important Israeli work on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem. *Using Haganah and Zionist archives he established* beyond any reasonable doubt that there had been a forced exodus of Palestinians as a result of a specific policy of "transfer" which had been adopted and approved by Ben-Gurion. Morris's meticulous work showed that in district after district commanders had been ordered to drive out Palestinians, burn villages, systematically take over their homes and property. Yet strangely enough, by the end of the book Morris seems reluctant to draw the inevitable conclusions from his own evidence. *Instead of saying* outright that the Palestinians were, in fact, driven out he says that they were partially driven out by Zionist forces, and partially "left" as a result of war. It is as if he was still enough of a Zionist to believe the ideological version —that Palestinians left on their own without Israeli eviction— rather than completely to accept his own evidence, which is that Zionist policy dictated Palestinian exodus. Similarly, in his book Sternhell admits that the Zionists never considered the Arabs as a problem because if they did they would have openly admitted that the Zionist plan to establish a Jewish state could not have been realised without also getting rid of the Palestinians. But he still insisted during the conference in Paris that although it was morally wrong to expel Palestinians, it was necessary to do so.



Israeli soldiers outside Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem last Friday *(photo: AFP)*

"The Palestinian side was much more urgent, more severe and even emotional in its insistence on the need for new history. The reason is of course that Israel, and consequently most Israelis, are the dominant party in the conflict: they hold all the territory, have all the military power, and can therefore take the time, and have the luxury to sit back and let the debate unfold calmly"

Despite these discordances it is impressive that when pushed hard either by Pappe or by the Palestinians, both Morris and Sternhell appeared to hesitate. I take their *changing views as symptomatic* of a deeper change taking place inside Israel. The point here is that a significant change in the main lines of Zionist ideology cannot really occur within the hegemony of official politics, either Labour or Likud, but must take place outside that particular context, that is, where intellectuals are more free to ponder and reflect upon the unsettling realities of present-day Israel. The problem with other attempts by intellectuals on both sides to influence Netanyahu's *policies, for instance, is that as in the* case of the Copenhagen group they take place too close to governments who have a much narrower, much shorter-range view of things. If the years since 1993 have shown anything it is that no matter how enlightened or liberal, the official Zionist view of the conflict with the Palestinians (and this is as true of Left Zionists like Meretz or centre left people like Shimon Peres) is prepared to live with the schizophrenia I referred to above. Yes, we want peace with the Palestinians, but no, there was nothing wrong with what we had to do in 1948. As far as real peace is concerned this basic contradiction is quite untenable, since it accepts the notion that Palestinians in their own land are secondary to Jews. Moreover, it also accepts the fundamental contradiction between Zionism and democracy (how can one have a democratic Jewish state and, as is now the case, one million non-Jews who are not equal in rights, land owning, or work to the Jews?). The great virtue of the new *historians is that* their work at least pushes the contradictions within Zionism to limits otherwise not apparent to most Israelis, and even many Arabs.

It is certainly true that the great political importance today of the new Israeli historians is that they have confirmed what generations of Palestinians, historians or otherwise, have been saying about what happened to us as a people at the hands of Israel. And of course they have done so as Israelis who in some measure speak *for the conscience of their people and society.* But here, speaking self-critically, I feel that as Arabs generally, and Palestinians in particular, we must also begin to explore our own histories, myths, and patriarchal ideas of the nation, something which, for obvious reasons we have not so far done. During the Paris colloquium Palestinians, including myself, were speaking with a great sense of urgency about the present since, in this present, the Palestinian *nakba* continues. Dispossession goes on, and the denial of our rights has taken new and more punishing forms. Nevertheless, as intellectuals and historians we have a duty to look at our history, the history of our leaderships, and of our institutions with a new critical eye. Is there something about those that can perhaps explain the difficulties as a people that we now find ourselves in? What about the conflict between the great families or *hamulas*, the fact that our leaders have traditionally not been elected democratically, *and the fact*, equally *disastrous*, that we seem to reproduce corruption and mediocrity in each new generation? These are serious, and even crucial matters, and they cannot either be left unanswered or postponed indefinitely under the guise of national defence and national unity. There is perhaps a start of critical self-awareness in Yezid Sayegh's new book on the history of Palestinian armed struggle, but we need more concretely political and critical works of that sort, works whose grasp of all the *complexities* and *paradoxes* of *our history* are not shied away from.

So far as I know neither the work of Morris, Pappe, or Sternhell has been translated into Arabic. This absence should be remedied forthwith. Just as important, I think, is the need for Arab intellectuals to interact directly with these historians by having them invited for discussions in Arab universities, cultural centres, and public fora. Similarly I believe it is our duty as Palestinian and yes, even Arab intellectuals to engage Israeli academic and intellectual audiences by lecturing at Israeli centres, openly, courageously, uncompromisingly. What have years of refusing to deal with Israel done for us? Nothing at all, except to weaken us and weaken our perception of our opponent. Politics since 1948 is now at an end, buried in the failures of the Oslo process of attempted separation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. As part of the new politics I have been speaking about in these articles, a splendid opportunity *presents itself* in continued interaction with the new Israeli historians who, while a tiny minority nevertheless represent a phenomenon of considerable importance. Their work, for instance, had a great influence on the 22 part film series, *Tekuma*, shown on Israeli television as a history of the state produced for its 50th year celebrations. They are greatly in demand in Israeli schools as lecturers, and their work has attracted the attention of historians and others in both Europe and the United States. It *seems* anomalous, *not to say retrograde, that the* one place they have not been fully heard is the Arab world, but we need to rid ourselves of our racial prejudices and ostrich-like attitudes and make the effort to change the situation. The time has come.

Facts, lies and videotapes

Thomas Gorguissian reports from Washington on the "hate campaign" led by pro-Israeli groups to prevent the American public from hearing a different voice

Last Friday, the Coalition of Mosques in the Washington area called for a prayer service in Lafayette Park, across from the White House. The service was attended by almost 1,000 people, according to the sponsors of the event. On the same day, *The Washington Times* published a whole page paid advertisement commemorating "The 50th Anniversary of the Loss of Palestine", which listed "a few troubling facts" about the state of Israel. *The Washington Post* had refused to print the same advertisement unless the sponsors agreed "to soften the language" — which they refused to do.

The participants in the event which took place in Lafayette Park expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people, and praised First Lady Hillary Clinton's "courageous stand" when she announced two weeks ago that she personally supported the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

In recent weeks, the American public has been subject to a massive barrage of elegies in praise of Israel at the occasion of its 50th anniversary: celebrations at the Kennedy Centre; CBS's Hollywood-style two-hour special about Israel, which featured President Bill Clinton praising the Jewish state for "making the desert bloom"; the Vice-President Al Gore speaking of Israel as the fulfillment of a Biblical promise; special TV programmes and newspaper and magazine supplements. All this was "too much and too disgusting, especially when the Palestinian element is completely and deliberately denied," one participant at the prayer gathering said.

Last Friday's gathering represented the culmination of weeks of alternative events organised in the US by Arab Americans and supporters of the Palestinian national struggle. At Georgetown University in Washington DC, the Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies and the university's Arab Club organised a programme of activities which opened with a lecture by Hisham Sharabi, Palestinian history professor at Georgetown University, in which he asked: "Will the Palestinians be the Jews of the 21st century? Perhaps. But they will not be the Zionists of the 21st century."

The Georgetown University programme covered various aspects of the 50-year Palestinian experience, as well as the special nature of American-Israeli relations. In the month-long series called "50 Years of Occupation", topics discussed in different panels included: "human rights"; "selective morality: US aid to Israel"; "Zionism and its discontents"; and "facts, lies and videotapes: media reporting." The series also included a screening of the film "Jerusalem, an occupation set in stone," and closed with a speech by Palestinian *minister* and human rights activist, Hanan Ashrawi, about the future of Palestine. During the same period, Georgetown's Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies also held a photo exhibition on "the Palestinian *experience*" and hosted Palestinian-American poet Lisa Majjaj, who lectured on "narrating the diaspora: Palestinian literature in the US."



A few weeks earlier, on 9 April, a full-page advertisement commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Deir Yassin massacre appeared in *The Washington Post*, under the headline: "Remember". Though there was nothing in that advertisement that Arabs did not know, it was a shock to those unaware of the bloody history of the creation of the state of Israel. Two days before the publication of *The Washington Post advertisement*, Georgetown University's Gaston Hall was the gathering place for a Deir Yassin remembrance meeting. Speakers in the meeting included Prof. Dan McGowan, founder of the "Deir Yassin Remembered" campaign, and Ahmed Assad, a Deir Yassin survivor who was 15 when the massacre took place. McGowan described the work completed, and what still is to be done by "Deir Yassin Remembered". The accomplishments include a new book, "Remembering Deir Yassin," maps and a Web site. The present challenge is to get Palestinian support for a memorial to be built in Deir Yassin for the vic*tims of the massacre.*

The events organised by the Arab Club at Georgetown University were repeatedly challenged by the Georgetown Israel Association. Members of the association first tried to have many of the events cancelled, noting that the main subject and target of the lectures was to counterpoint the celebration of the birth of Israel. When their attempt failed, they tried, through administrative channels, to change the name of the series "50 Years of Occupation", questioning the accuracy of the word "occupation." Members of the Israel Association at Georgetown voiced their doubts concerning the identity and the intentions of those who might participate in, or support, or finance these events. They distributed and posted hate flyers on campus, both anonymous and under the pseudo-name of "Concerned Georgetown Students." They accused the organisers and their guests of being "anti-semite" and "denying the Holocaust".

Finally, they tried to mobilise public opinion outside the university campus turning the whole issue into a topic of concern for local and national Jewish circles. The Jewish weekly *Forward* claimed that at stake was the issue of federal funding of some studies in the university, especially those related to the Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, which — as it happened — was not financially sponsoring this series of lectures and activities.

The front-page story on the 24 April issue of *Forward* screamed in the headline "Uncle Sam Funds 'Hate 101' at Georgetown Teach-In". The story warned: "Check out how Uncle Sam *is celebrating Israel's 50th birthday with your* tax dollars." Though there was plenty of evidence of squandering tax dollars on commemorating 50 years of Israel's existence around Washington, the events at Georgetown were certainly not among them.

While the debate was raging on campus, *The Hoya*, the university's newspaper, provided the too-often silenced voices with an opportunity to be heard. The moment the controversy reached the mainstream media, however, the hawkish, pro-Israeli voices were loud enough to deafen all ears.

Fall of a dictator

The bubble of the Asian economic miracle has burst; the international "relief" package is extracting a heavy toll; an old and bloody dictatorship cracks at the seams. **Faiza Rady** observes the countdown



Indonesian school children mourn the death of a fallen pro-democracy activist in the capital Jakarta *(photo: AFP)*

Desperately maintaining a slipping grip on power despite the raging demonstrations that have rocked Indonesia over the past three weeks and caused the death of at least 500 people, President Suharto announced on Tuesday that he would step down —but only after introducing long called for political reforms and holding parliamentary elections. "Any time, if the people want me to step down, I am ready to resign, as long as it is conducted constitutionally," Budi Santosa, the chancellor of the Indonesian University, quoted Suharto as saying.

Understandably perhaps, Suharto's woefully mimicked resignation pledge lacked credibility among the Indonesian public. Students and workers continued to demand his immediaide resignation and rallied against World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) dictates of fiscal austerity measures. Closely monitoring the ongoing crisis, Dennis de Tray, the WB country director for Indonesia, said on Monday that international donors must perform a "major reassessment" of the situation in Indonesia because of the social unrest.

"The medicine dished out by the IMF is the same as ever," explained economist Alan Woods on a Web site dealing with economic issues. "Loans are given on condition that the entire burden of the crisis is placed squarely on the shoulders of the people ("austerity"). Growth must slow down, unemployment must grow, factories and banks must close, interest rates must rise, budgets must be balanced, living standards reduced."

In the case of Indonesia, the agencies' prescriptions combined with the effects of the crisis to result in a drastic devaluation of the national currency — the rupiah — which depreciated 400 per cent against the US dollar over the last nine months, a spiralling inflation rate of 33 per cent in the first quarter of 1998, lay-offs affecting an estimated 10 million workers, skyrocketing prices of staple commodities and the reduction of subsidies on gas and kerosene — resulting in 71 per cent and 25 per cent price hikes respectively. "When Indonesia explodes, it's going to be very extreme. Believe me, the people are very angry," *Newsweek* quoted Jakarta business consultant Wilson Nababan as saying.

Attending the G-15 meeting in Cairo last week, the Indonesian dictator declared that he would consider stepping down if the people withdrew their confidence in him. "If I am no longer trusted, I will become a *pandito* (sage) and endeavor to get closer to God," he said. A somewhat bizarre proposition coming from a man who came to power through a bloody US-backed military coup, during which Suharto overthrew the democratically-elected government of leftist President Ahmed Sukarno, and killed an estimated 500,000 people. In addition, Suharto "launched the greatest massacre since the Holocaust... [slaughtering] hundreds of thousands of mostly landless peasants in a few months during his 1975 invasion and annexation of East Timor," wrote renowned linguist and political writer Noam Chomsky.

Raising the worn-out spectre of communist agitation and the imminent threat of a replay of the massacres of old, Home Affairs Minister Raden Hartono warned that "the people should remain alert so that the sad events will not be repeated, because I have already reminded you that behind this unrest are remnants of the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia)."

Meanwhile, Indonesia's government-controlled television also got out of hand — showing thousands of demonstrating students and impoverished workers burning Suharto in effigy and condemning him to death. "[The students] are widening the cracks in the facade of Mr Suharto's impregnability," wrote *The Economist*. "Even the media, used to censoring itself for fear of reprisals, is covering their protests. So millions of Indonesians are able, for the first time, to see their compatriots demanding Suharto's downfall."

Upon his return from the G-15 meeting in Cairo, Suharto quickly and efficiently quelled the media's sudden insubordination by barring any coverage of the demonstrations. Suharto's attempt to quell the raging social unrest by rolling back gas and kerosene price hikes and ordering the army into Jakarta, however, proved less successful.

Unwilling to accept belated and token gestures of appeasement, the Indonesian people continued to demonstrate — demanding Suharto's ouster. And while some of the troops deployed in the capital scrupulously guarded embassies and foreign compounds, soldiers and protesting students seemingly fraternised as troops watched the marches from a distance without intervening. "Indonesian army troops dispatched to trouble spots in Jakarta were greeted with wild applause by the rioters, and the soldiers smiled and raised their fists in return," reported *The New York Times*.

While rumours of a rift in the military and disaffection among junior officers swirl in Jakarta, the multinational corporate establishment is desperately scrutinising the Indonesian top brass in the hope of hand-picking a compliant successor to the aging dictator from the army leadership.

"With no clear, organised political opposition in Indonesia, the 'market' is increasingly looking to the Indonesian armed forces as a savior," said David Stars, a currency strategist with 4Cast, a London-based market analyst agency.

The chief of Indonesia's armed forces, General Wiranto, may very well emerge as a potential "market" candidate. Attempting to walk a tightrope between Suharto and the people, Wiranto possibly groomed himself for the top job by remaining on the sidelines of events. As rallies and demonstrations rocked the capital, he failed to impose a curfew and cautiously restrained his troops — keeping them at bay from the protesters.

Whereas the WB and the IMF blamed the turmoil on the regime's nepotism, rampant corruption, embezzlement of public funds and blatant fiscal mismanagement, many analysts believe that the agencies' economic reform package actually sparked off the turmoil.

Suharto, his family and his ruling clique have succeeded in monopolising a large chunk of the nation's capital for the past two decades. As early as 1980, Suharto's daughter Siti Hardiyanti Hastuti, nicknamed Tutut, started the Citra Lamtoro Gung Conglomerate — an outfit worth an estimated $2 billion, and a major shareholder in the country's real estate, toll roads, major highways, telecommunication, television, gas and a bank.

Tutut's brother, Bambang Trihatmojo, is the co-owner of the Bimantara Group — a $3 billion concern — with business interests in television, the chemical industry, banking, automotive manufacturing and oil refineries among other things. And Suharto's youngest son, Hutomo Mandala Putra — Tommy to his cronies — generally regarded as less ambitious than his siblings, owns a conglomerate, Humpuss, which is only evaluated at $600 million. As for Suharto himself, a 1997 *Forbes* magazine article evaluated his personal fortune at $16 billion.

Beyond the Suharto clan's pillage of the country's resources, many economists agree that the Indonesian crisis extends to the entire region and cannot only be reduced to grand-scale nepotism, looting and profiteering of the ruling class. "The problem is the real crisis [in East Asia], in which thousands of factories are shuttered, millions of jobs are lost and prices soar out of control, is only just beginning," commented *Newsweek*.

The crisis started last July with the slippage of the Thai currency caused by the weakness of an over-stretched, vastly indebted banking system. As a result of sudden market "nervousness", foreign investors started pulling out and the system gave way. "Suddenly 'confidence' collapses. Someone, or some group, decides that the whole structure is unsound and begins to sell. And sell. And sell. This is a classical development, seen in every cycle, and not at all the result of Thai or Asian peculiarities," explained Woods.

This "classical development" also applies to the Indonesian economy that was grounded in flighty, non-productive speculative capital. Attracted by the speculative bubble of Asian "boom" years of the 1980s and 1990s, both foreign and national investors poured their money into the property market, which caused a spiraling inflation of real estate and property values. This, in turn, induced a cycle of increased investment and property development projects — resulting in the over-extension and indebtedness of the banking system. After capital flight finally hit Indonesia when the foreign debt reached $137.4 billion, and the stock market crashed by 22 per cent, the government announced the fusion of a number of big banks considered insolvent. But the debacle did not end there, the country needed a major bailout from the IMF to the tune of $43 billion. Yet, paying the price of this bailout according to IMF directives, has so far cost Suharto dearly.

Sierra Leone secrets

A Queen's Scout, a Scot's Guard or Cook in the dark? Britain's hands were bloodied in Sierra Leone, writes **Gamal Nkrumah** from London

Whoever returned Sierra Leonean President Ahmed Tijan Kabbah to power on 10 March 1998 matters much less than the likely consequences. Kabbah, a former lawyer who once practised at Gray's Inn in London, was ousted by a military junta headed by Sandhurst graduate Jonny Paul Koroma on 25 May 1997. The ousted president, a former United Nations Development Programme officer, fled the Sierra Leonean capital Freetown for neighbouring Guinea where he took refuge in the capital Conakry.

From Conakry, the democratically elected President Kabbah plotted his return. In October 1997 the UN imposed an arms embargo on Sierra Leone. But, evidence is mounting that the British Foreign Office was involved in the reinstatement of Kabbah. The British foreign secretary, Robin Cook, denied any knowledge of Britain's connivance in the supply of mercenaries in aid of Kabbah's cause, in breach of UN Resolution 1132, which imposed an arms embargo on Sierra Leone. Cook's blaming of his officials at the Foreign Office complicated matters. Tony Lloyd, minister of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs, confessed to misleading the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee last week. An independent inquiry was set up to look into the arms-for-Africa affair, and Cook pledged to resign if the inquiry implicates him.

The arms-for-Africa scandal has put the Labour government on the spot. Many heads are likely to roll if the results of the inquiry implicate Cook and his officials at the Foreign Office in a conspiracy to supply arms to oust the Sierra Leonean junta. While there would be no problem with the fact that Britain could have helped restore a democratically elected president, it is the alleged tactics that have caused the storm. If indeed the Foreign Office took part in the supply of arms to the Sierra Leonean rebels, then it would be tantamount to a deliberate breach of a UN resolution. For a Labour government that came to power with the promise of an "ethical" foreign policy, that would be a big embarrassment.

Fighting for political survival, Cook claimed in a televised interview that no one had produced a "shred of evidence" that his officials were involved in the arms-to Africa scandal. But, Lord Avebury, leading human rights campaigner, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "there is undisputed evidence of Foreign Office complicity in the arms-to-Africa scandal."

In May 1997, Lord Avebury wrote to Lloyd expressing concern about possible Nigerian intervention in Sierra Leone. "It is reported that Nigerian forces are being dispatched to Sierra Leone, with the object of restoring President Kabbah, and that the Americans are encouraging this enterprise. The Nigerians think they could get back into the good books of the international community by doing the Americans' bidding," Lord Avebury told Lloyd. He warned of the "incongruous spectacle of the Nigerian military posing as the defenders of democracy: If Nigeria's strongman General Sani Abacha can pose as the champion of an elected government, his regime will gain a spurious credibility on the world stage, while keeping its own supporters of democracy, including the legitimate president, Chief MK Abiola, safely behind bars."

Moreover, United States officials seem to have been in the know as well. John Hirsch, the US ambassador in Sierra Leone, and David Kaenper, the director of African Analysis, the bureau of intelligence and research at the US State Department, knew about the arms-to-Africa affair. British and American complicity in the arms-for-Africa scandal seems to be irrefutable.

While the world believed that the Nigerian-led West African peace-keeping force, ECOMOG, forced out the Sierra Leonean junta single-handedly, it now appears that Britain masterminded the whole affair. According to Lord Avebury, an Indian-born Thai businessman facing extradition from Canada on embezzlement charges financed the counter coup because of his interests in Sierra Leone's diamond mining industry. Sierra Leone has vast mineral resources including diamonds, untapped reserves of aluminium ore and gold.

The Indian-born financier Rakesh Saxena funded the arming of Kabbah's poorly-trained 40,000-strong force of Kamajor tribesmen from northern Sierra Leone. The Kamajors were no match for Koroma's men. Saxena and Kabbah enlisted the help of British-based Sandline International, a company that, according to its founder, Lieutenant Colonel Tim Spicer, offers "special forces rapid reaction" around the world. Sandline has been involved in Africa and the Pacific, most notably putting down a rebellion in Papua New Guinea last year. Spicer claims that he discussed plans with British and American diplomats, military advisers and intelligence agents. A firm called Sky Air Cargo Services shipped over 35 tons of military hardware in a Boeing 707 to Sierra Leone. The Nigerian forces who controlled Sierra Leone's main airport, Lungi International, confiscated the AK47 rifles and other military equipment.

As controversy erupted in Britain about whether or not British officials knew beforehand of Nigeria's planned invasion of Sierra Leone, the media reported Sandline's links with the diamond mining firm, Diamondworks, for major concessions.

The British ambassador to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, met Kabbah in Conakry and is said to be "up to his neck in preparations for the Sierra Leonean counter-coup."

An old Africa hand who survived two coups in Uganda, a revolution in Ethiopia and civil war in Nigeria, Penfold's job is on the line.

Two months ago, Lord Avebury was invited to meet Ann Grant, head of Africa Equatorial Department at the British Foreign Office and Lynda St Cook, the Sierra Leone desk officer, to discuss the situation in Sierra Leone. Avebury says that this was the "first time in 36 years as a politician that Foreign Office officials had asked to see me."

It later transpired that Sandline International representatives were also meeting with Foreign Office officials.

Meanwhile, the British Navy was helping to restore Kabbah to power. While the British Defence Ministry claims that the Royal Navy warship HMS Cornwall was in Sierra Leone on a humanitarian mission, Sandline International says that HMS Cornwall was in Sierra Leone to assist in the counter-coup.

Perhaps the most interesting fact to emerge from the arms-to-Africa scandal is the close collaboration between Western powers and African so-called peace-keeping forces. Compliant African civilian and military regimes collaborate with the West for the exploitation of the continent's vast mineral resources. While publicly shunning Nigeria's Abacha and treating him as a pariah, Western powers have collaborated closely with his regime.

The British media focused on personalities embroiled in the arms-for-Africa scandal. But, as far as Africans are concerned, the problem is not about key characters such as former Scots Guard Tim Spicer, former Queen's Scout Penfold, or even Robin Cook's predicament. The crisis is essentially about Western double standards as Lord Avebury so aptly puts it. The alleged British complicity in the Sierra Leonean counter-coup raises doubts about the creation of an African peace-keeping force which is independent of Western powers and which is not controlled by foreign mercenaries and mineral concerns.

Behind the Vatican's gates

A bizarre murder-suicide involving two members of the Pope's elite Swiss Guard has dropped the Vatican into a vortex of speculation and conspiracy theories, writes **Samia Nkrumah** from Rome

The mysterious murder of Alois Estermann, the newly-appointed head of the Papal Swiss Guard, earlier in the month, took the Vatican authorities and the world by surprise. The bodies of Estermann, his wife and a young guard were found lying outside the couple's apartment in Vatican City on 4 May.

The official briefing delivered by Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls the day after the killings stated that "Vice-corporal Cedric Tornay, after firing two bullets from his regulation weapon at Commander Estermann and one bullet at the wife of the commander, committed suicide." Another Vatican spokesman added that Tornay committed the murders in a "fit of madness" after receiving an official reprimand for repeatedly breaking the midnight curfew enforced on the guards. The young guard had also recently been excluded from the list of guards receiving a medal for meritorious service.

The Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* was the first to publish an apparent suicide note that Tornay wrote to his family which ties in with the official explanation of the killings. Not since the 1981 assassination attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II has there been a more violent incident inside the walls of Vatican City. More surprisingly, it was committed by a member of the Pontiff's own guards, the very people entrusted with the job of protecting the Pope, the bishops and their premises.

The murders presented an opportunity to those pursuing many unanswered questions from the Vatican. Fueled by the city-state's usual economical style of dealing with events involving its officials, the Italian media not only speculated on alternative motives for the latest shooting but revived controversial claims of past Vatican cover-ups as well. Suspicions surrounding the death of the former Pope John Paul I, a month after he was elected in order to conceal financial misdemeanour involving Vatican officials, were aired, and doubts were raised over the identity of forces behind the present Pontiff's 1981 attacker, Mehmet Ali Agca.

In the Estermann case, earlier suggestions hinted that he was a homosexual, then reports charged that his wife, Gladys Meza Romero, was involved with Tornay, the young guard. The latest allegations which appeared in a German newspaper *Berliner Kurier* said that Estermann had been a spy for the former East German Stasi secret police operating under the code name of "Werder".

The *Kurier* subsequently acknowledged that the espionage story came from an anonymous caller. And last week, an ex-Stasi chief insisted in an interview with the Italian paper *La Stampa* that the Stasi mole in the Vatican was another man, not Estermann. Describing the espionage story as "inconceivable", the Vatican flatly denied the allegations.

Nevertheless, it took a full six months for the Pope to appoint Estermann as the new commander of the Swiss Guards after his predecessor retired. This is despite the fact that Estermann was a 15-year veteran of the Papal security force who helped shield the Pope with his own body during the 1981 assassination attempt. If these accusations hold water, then it explains the delay in appointing Estermann until investigations into the espionage allegations were concluded.

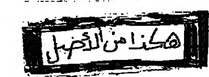
But Mario Biasetti, whose recently released film *Soldiers of the Pope* documents the contemporary historical role of the Swiss Guards, scoffs at such reports. Biasetti told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he spent many months with the Swiss Guards and knew the three dead people very well. "Estermann was not a homosexual and Tornay was always late for the midnight curfew because he had a girlfriend, a fact subsequently acknowledged by some Italian papers," he said, adding that Tornay's punishment effectively deprived him of the chance of becoming an officer. The Papal Swiss Guards, numbering around 100, are not highly paid. A regular guard gets around $12,000 a year and they work from 12 to 14 hours a day in a closed society. On the plus side, to have served in the Papal Swiss Guards is a boost to the career of any young soldier. They are carefully selected from the Swiss army and must be practising Catholics. Selections are made after investigating candidates who are approved by Swiss bishops.

Can the Swiss Guards make a difference to the security of the Pope? "Not entirely," says Biasetti, because after all "the two Swiss Guards close to the Pope and who walk next to his jeep are in civilian clothes and one of them is usually the guards' commander. They only carry tear gas but no weapons in compliance with the Pope's wishes." Moreover, the Vatican, which had a $85 million budget deficit last year, needs to curb its expenses.

Pope John Paul II, the first-ever non-Italian Pontiff, is quite explicit on stating the Vatican's position on various political and moral issues. In many cases this has inspired strong feelings both for and against the Vatican. The Pontiff is unswerving in his belief in political freedom, but advocates strict opposition to birth control. His anti-communist stance has not always meant a pro-American position.

The Vatican's position on the status of Jerusalem has been consistent and in line with Security Council Resolution 478 of 1980. The Holy See has always insisted that the territorial question regarding Jerusalem "should be resolved quickly and by negotiation" and that the part of the city militarily occupied in 1967 and annexed and declared capital of Israel is occupied territory. This year saw Pope John Paul II visit countries shunned by the United States such as the much publicised visit to Cuba in January and his trip to Nigeria in April for the beatification of a bishop. This visit coincided with US President Bill Clinton's Africa tour where Nigeria was excluded from the agenda to show US disapproval of the Nigerian regime's human rights record.

The Vatican has certainly attempted to conduct its own damage-control campaign in the aftermath of killings. At the funeral service of Estermann, his wife and Tornay, the latter's mother shook hands with Estermann's parents as part of the exchange of the sign of peace ritual in Roman Catholic services. And while these handshakes have not put to rest the mystery surrounding the triple tragedy, the Pope took a significant step when he prayed over the coffin of Tornay despite the fact that he killed two people and shot himself. In 1983, religious funeral services for suicide victims were forbidden by the Catholic church. Since then, the option has been left to the priest's discretion. It is difficult to imagine priests declining to hold religious funeral services for suicide victims in the future after the Pope's latest gesture.



هكذا من الأصل

Privatisation of public sector banks takes off

The People's Assembly Economic Affairs Committee has approved a historic draft law aimed at opening up the government-owned banking sector to private ownership for the first time in 45 years. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

At least one of Egypt's four major public sector banks is to be privatised within the next three years in advance of significant reforms that will allow the private sector and individuals greater access to the largely closed government-owned banking sector.

Addressing a meeting of the People's Assembly Economic Affairs Committee last Sunday Youssef Boutros-Ghali, minister of economy, defended the move and brushed aside criticisms by parliamentary opponents of a new draft law aimed at regulating the private sector's contribution to the capitals of the government's four commercial public sector banks.

Opponents claim that this new watershed privatisation move could allow the public sector banks, along with the entire national economy, to fall a prey to a favoured handful of wealthy businessmen.

The five-article draft law, an amendment of Law 120/1975 regulating the performance of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), allows the private sector to own shares, with no specified limit, in the state-owned public sector banks. In such a case, the articles in Law 120/1975 regulating the formation of boards of public sector banks will no longer apply to the privatised bank. It will rather be subject to such free market legislation as the Banking and Credit Law (163/1975), the joint-stock companies law (159/1981), and the capital market law (no.95/1992).

The new draft law states that the board of the privatised bank will include no less than five and no more than 15 members. Board members representing the private sector will be appointed by the bank's general assembly in proportion with the private sector's investment in the bank. The remaining public sector board members will be appointed by the prime minister.

The economy minister will be empowered to appoint public sector representatives to the bank's general assembly, in proportion with the government's contribution to the capital of the bank.

Boutros-Ghali, in an attempt to mute harsh criticism raised during the parliamentary committee's evening meeting, emphasised that "the government will not apply the law to state bank privatisation before the year 2001." Ghali also promised that state banks would not be fully sold to foreigners for the time being because of the "unstable financial market, especially in Southeast Asia." He explained that "gradualism" is the hallmark of the government in implementing its economic policies.

"Once a decision for privatising a certain public sector bank is finally taken, a stage of almost one year will have to pass for valuating the assets of this bank. Another stage of six months will also have to pass for deciding on the way this bank will be privatised. Later, the sale of the bank will be confined to Egyptians only. If this proved successful, the door could be later opened to foreigners," Boutros-Ghali explained.

To strengthen his argument, Boutros-Ghali noted that although the government formally launched the privatisation programme in 1990, it took six years of cautious study to start seriously implementing the programme. "During this period, the government sold a mere three companies. This means that the privatisation programme is implemented in light of the size of the market and the efficiency of supervisory agencies," he said.

According to Boutros-Ghali, Egypt is still one of the few countries in which public sector banks still aren't privatised. This, he added, is explained in the outside world as proof that the national economy is not efficient or mature because it still has to be dominated by the state.

"The parliament's approval of the new bill will, therefore, be a message to the outside world that the Egyptian economy has reached a point of total efficiency and that Egypt has completed creating the financial supervisory tools necessary to allow the privatisation of its giant public sector banks without fears," Boutros-Ghali said.

The new bill, he said, means "turning a new page in the history of the Egyptian economy... The seven-year-old privatisation achievements in Egypt are now crowned by this new bill. The bill marks a total departure from 45-year-old policies during which Egypt's giant banks have been dominated by the state."

He concluded that the bill is part of a package of reforms, which the government regards as vital to achieving 7-8 per cent economic growth by 2001. He indicated a new bill aimed at privatising the insurance sector was already submitted to the People's Assembly for discussion.

Joining forces with the Economy Minister, CBE's governor Ismail Hassan explained that the new banking bill does not mean that all the four giant banks will be subject to privatisation. "As far as I know, the name of the bank which would be privatised and how many of its shares would be sold off will be decided through joint consultation with the People's Assembly. This is something left to you, as MPs to decide with the government," said Hassan.

Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), argued that it is no longer acceptable to discriminate between public and private sectors in terms of guarantees and privileges. "Money should be deposited in efficient banks, be they private or public," said Abdel-Aziz. In this context, Abdel-Aziz explained that the public sector banks now perform 42 per cent of the banking business in Egypt, down from 80 per cent seven years ago. This bill, he said, "should be a plea to the People's Assembly that public sector banks face a dire need to raise their capital, and the only way to do this is privatisation."

He also argued that privatisation is a necessary tool for Egyptian banks to face the wars of liberalisation of financial services in the next century.

The new bill, however, faced strong resistance from a variety of MPs, including bankers. The Committee's deputy chairman Abdel-Rahman Baraka, manager of a joint-stock bank, described the bill as dangerous enough to cause a shock to the national economy. "Because this bill deals with the giant public banks, which form the central nerve of the national economy, it could open the door for a number of international financial institutions to dominate these banks and steer them away from the requirements of the national economy," said Baraka.

Along the same lines, MP Ahmed Shiha, a Cairene businessman, argued that most national projects in Egypt are now dominated by a favoured handful of businessmen. "This happened in Korea and Indonesia and they plundered banks in these countries. Why the hell wouldn't the same thing happen in Egypt through privatising public sector banks," Shiha asked.

He also quoted Mahathir Mohamed, Malaysia's prime minister, as warning against the infiltration of foreign capital into domestic economies through the premature liberalisation of financial services. Mostafa El-Said, a former economy minister, also warned that privatisation of giant public banks in Egypt could result in new bank boards, with their interests focused on transferring the profits of these banks to outside markets at the expense of domestic development plans. El-Said called for imposing a ceiling of foreign ownership at 49 per cent for large banks.

But leftist leader Khaled Mohieddin, chairman of the opposition Tagammu Party, objected to the bill, questioning the wisdom of privatising public banks at a time when most of them are owed huge debts by public sector companies. In a statement entitled "a national catastrophe" the Tagammu Party contended that the new banking and insurance bills come as a result of strong pressure exerted by the IMF and the US Agency for International Development. The Tagammu statement warned that the new bills will lead Egypt's banking and insurance assets into the hands of foreigners, with Israeli and Jewish capitalists in control behind the scenes.

In his response, CBE's Governor Hassan said that the Central Bank has learned well the hard lessons of not only the financial meltdown in Southeast Asia, but also the financial crisis in Mexico. "We have all the supervisory tools to prevent such crises in Egypt, including the right to disband the board of any bank. Boutros-Ghali also shrugged off any possibility that giant public sector banks could fall prey to groups of connected businessmen. "I would like to emphasise again that we have already completed our institutional and legal financial frameworks and right now, we are applying the internationally accepted financial and banking criterion of the Basel conference," he said.

Boutros-Ghali said the entire world has come to accept the fact that the private sector is the best administrator of economic resources. "In the banking sector, the public sector has proved to be inefficient and lacks effective supervision of their financial resources. Thus, I want to ask: is it not high time to let the public sector banks in Egypt be more efficiently run through the private sector?"

Dissecting Egypt's catch-up potential

A recent report by the US investment banking firm, Goldman Sachs, gives kudos to Egypt's economy, but adds that it needs more liberalisation to catch up with other middle-income emerging markets. Aziza Sami reviews the report



Following substantial financial stabilisation, Egypt's economy will enjoy a "favourable emerging markets outlook" for the rest of 1998, predicts a Goldman Sachs report released recently

Although, according to the report, the Egyptian government has virtually no financing needs, it is likely to issue a benchmark bond this year.

The report, entitled "Egypt: Catch-Up Potential Starting to Show," compares Egypt with seven other similarly rated economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These include Argentina, Mexico, Morocco, Panama, the Philippines, South Africa and Tunisia.

Egypt currently holds a Ba1/BBB long-term rating based on its strong fiscal credentials — which puts it on the same footing with these economies.

Moody's, a leading credit rating agency, had upgraded Egypt's sovereign rating one notch to Ba1 in November 1997, based on the significant improvement in its balance sheet, attained through a tight fiscal stance, accelerating growth and external equilibrium.

Fiscal stock and flow problems have been addressed through external debt relief and large expenditure cuts. These measures have facilitated the maintenance of a fixed nominal exchange rate, through a reduction in inflation, and an improvement of the country's external position.

As of 1997, 90 per cent of Egypt's total external debt was medium and long-term, with 80.4 per cent of the total owed to official creditors.

"Few doubts remain concerning the sustainability of Egypt's external debt position," says the Goldman Sachs report. "In fact, the present value of external debt is below face value, given concessional low interest rates on rescheduled Paris Club debt. This is reflected in the country's relatively low external debt ratio."

Among the eight "emerging" economies, Egypt is the least indebted. Its primary fiscal surplus distinguishes it among the similarly rated sovereigns, and there is the promise that its public debt ratio will improve, converging towards the group's mean in the medium term.

Although its gross public debt is by far the highest, Egypt's relative net public debt position is more favourable, because of its large stock of pension savings and sterilisation instruments, conducted through the issuance of government debt by the Ministry of Finance, the proceeds of which are deposited with the Central Bank of Egypt.

The report predicts "a moderate reversal in Egypt's recent macro-economic progress, in 1998, perhaps extending into the first half of 1999."

However, the report warns that the economy will be "relatively hard hit" as a result of the Asian crisis. This is because 60 per cent of Egypt's exports are commodities, primarily oil and natural gas, which have suffered large price declines in recent months because of increases in supply coupled with an anticipated drop in Asian demand.

The rest of Egypt's exports are intensive, low value added products which will face stiff third-market competition from the ASEAN countries which achieved dramatic improvements in their labour-cost competitiveness.

The report also predicts that the recovery of the tourist industry after November's terrorist attack in Luxor would be gradual. It assesses the drop in tourist arrivals as having been 20-30 per cent of levels observed in the comparable period a year ago and predicts that "a return in confidence may take time given the absence of further incidences."

The expected Egyptian real GDP growth would have been around 5.5 per cent in 1998, the report says, but taking into account the "negative growth surprise" ensuing from the Asian crisis and the Luxor incident, real GDP growth in 1998 will be around 4.0 per cent.

Since the economy's main sources of non-tax fiscal revenues are oil exports and the Suez Canal, the Goldman Sachs report warns that budget revenues may be affected more than anticipated.

The government might respond by resorting to more aggressive expenditure cuts, and reducing subsidies and infrastructure development costs, rather than allow more fiscal deterioration.

On the other hand, the course of monetary policy will unlikely be altered by the slowdown in GDP growth and deteriorating terms of trade, which the Central Bank of Egypt might view as "one-time shocks rather than permanent adverse changes."

It will, therefore, continue to pursue an unchanged nominal exchange rate target.

The report is, however, critical of what it considers to be inadequate structural adjustment — namely, privatisation and financial sector and trade liberalisation. This aspect of Egypt's economic reform "has not been as spectacular" as its fiscal achievements, it says.

Further ratings by financial agencies will be contingent upon the degree and speed with which the government will further open up the economy

Despite the privatisation programme which has resulted in the sell-off of government stakes in dozens of enterprises, the state continues to dominate most of the banking system. And although tariff and non-tariff barriers are being gradually reduced, they remain high by international standards, the report adds.

Egypt's comparative macro-economic weakness also lies in its small and undiversified exports base, which is indicated by a large merchandise deficit, as well as inadequately low domestic savings and investment rates.

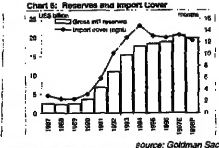
To catch up with middle-income emerging economies, Egypt will have to "deepen the structural aspects of its reform programme in the coming years, in particular, continued liberalisation of the financial sector, further privatisation, and a less pervasive, more transparent regulatory environment," the report says. "All are preconditions to achieve an increase in savings to support investment rates high enough to facilitate desirable rates of output growth."

Future upgrades are likely to be contingent on the implementation of tax and administrative reform, greater external openness and the development of non-traditional exports.

According to the report, the government's position on the speed with which it will accelerate privatisation is not clear.

"The expected moderate deterioration in the country's fiscal and external fundamentals may encourage the government to implement previously delayed structural reforms," the report says. "It plans to sell off 50 public sector enterprises, as well as one of the four public sector banks and one insurance company, but these transactions remain less likely, given the lack of specific plans."

"We expect the privatisation process to be carried out at a lower speed than originally intended, unless emerging markets asset prices stage an unexpectedly strong performance," the report adds. This is because the Egyptian government "not pressed for revenue, has historically favoured selling at higher valuations, rather than selling quickly."



Although the report advocates speedy liberalisation, it still expresses awareness of the other non-financial aspects of development saying that Egypt's rating prospects will be influenced by its "ability to maintain political stability and make further progress in a strategy of economic, social and political inclusion." It adds that "Lower per-capita income and an element of geopolitical risk are constraints on the sovereign rating which government policy should be focussed on addressing in order to prevent them from becoming binding limits on the country's development."

The report does not mention that it is because of these considerations that the Egyptian government has opted for a gradual transformation to a market economy.

Market report

Market slump deepens

THE MARKET continued its four-week long decline with almost all its sectors recording setbacks. The index lost 6.43 points to close at 381.86 during the week ending 14 May.

Medinat Nasr for Housing and Urbanisation Company, the first Egyptian company to be fully privatised through the stock exchange in mid-1996, has acquired 51 per cent of El-Nasr for Civil Works (NCW), which was offered two weeks ago.

The NCW shares' offering was poorly received — which was attributed by market experts to the fact that the offering price of LE35 was exaggerated. Medinat Nasr bought more than 2 million shares of NCW at LE33 for a share.

Another contracting company is to be offered during the coming period. Egyptian Contracting Company (Mokhtar Ibrahim) plans to offer 20 per cent of its equity at an estimated price of LE132 million. The company will be the sixth contracting company to be privatised, following NCW.

The offering of United Arab Shipping and Stevedoring (UASS) is being crippled. Existing individual shareholders of the company, the first shipping company to be privatised, have offered their shares at a price lower than the price at which the mother company floated the shares.

The company last week sold 395,262 shares to its employees at LE31 a share. However, most of the buying orders submitted by other investors hovered around LE29.

Saudi Prince Al-Waleed Bin Talaal has expressed interest in buying a major stake in another Egyptian private company. Two weeks ago he acquired a substantial slice of the offering floated by International Electronics. Last week his company expressed its interest in buying the entire LE92 million worth capital increase of the privately owned Alexandria Real Estate Investments, an affiliate of the Talaat Mostafa real estate group.

Commercial International Bank is still leading the plunge in the banking sector with another losing week as it closed at LE51.4 registering a loss of LE1.98 through the week. However, the transactions on the bank's shares represented 16 per cent of the overall market transactions.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Samson kicked about

Is the "new world order" cracking at the seams? It has received a bad beating, even from its friends.

At two locations thousands of miles apart, the United States was defied openly last week by India and Israel. Are these the rules of the game of world hegemony? The New Delhi government conducted five underground nuclear tests over a few days after a 24-year moratorium. The tests themselves took minutes, but the jolt they gave international geopolitics (not to mention the environment) was enormous.

India clearly was undaunted by the supposedly omnipotent US deterrent, which boasts more than 7,000 nuclear warheads. India simply said it wanted to establish itself as a nuclear power to withstand any pressures from China or Pakistan, which also has a nuclear capability.

New Delhi thumbed its nose at the US attempt to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons for everybody except, of course, Israel, to whose nuclear arsenal Washington has always turned a blind eye.

As India humiliated Uncle Sam in the desert, the United States was getting a different kind of drubbing from Netanyahu. He arrogantly rejected a US plan for a 13 per cent Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian West Bank territory and spurned a US proposal for summit talks with the Palestinians in Washington. Then he embarked on a US tour of his own, in which he condescendingly fitted in two meetings with Madeleine Albright.

As expected, no progress was made and the mood in US official circles was described as one of "gloom and exasperation". During this tour, Netanyahu continued to rub Clinton's nose in the dust, defying US pressure at every turn and holding well-publicised meetings in Washington and New York with pro-Israel American Jewish groups and congressional backers.

Washington has imposed sanctions on India, but there is no indication so far of what, if anything, it intends to do to bring Israel in line. Perhaps it is time to ask ourselves if US hegemony is as hegemonic as we thought.

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Italy
Rome: Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Fighting for acceptance

James Zogby reviews Arab American efforts to enter mainstream US politics and overcome adversity

Just 30 years ago, there was no Arab American community to speak of in the US. There were no national Arab American organisations and no unified community consciousness. There were some organisations, but they were mainly Lebanese social groupings or village and family-based associations. Individuals of Arab descent could and did become involved in US politics — but as individuals, without an ethnic (and certainly not an "Arab") identification.

When Arab American organisations did come into existence, they experienced two difficulties. Because they largely based themselves on Arab issues, they did not attract the overwhelming majority of Americans of Arab descent. Additionally, they did not direct their attention to the major arena of American politics — electoral activity. Nevertheless, these groups were vigorously attacked by the much larger and more powerful American Jewish organisations, which saw Arab Americans as a potential threat. Because these Arab American groups were on the margins of US politics, they were vulnerable to these attacks.

During the past 20 years, there has been a steady evolution of Arab American organising efforts, from the margins of US politics into the mainstream. But it was not an easy task. When, in this early period, Arab American organisations attempted to join broader US coalitions on foreign policy or civil rights concerns, they were often excluded because of American Jewish pressure.

During the 1970s, major Jewish groups published reports and issued warnings to the media and politicians on each and every Arab American organisation and leader. We were described as "terrorist supporters" and/or anti-Semites. Because some of these politicians and even some in the media took those warnings seriously, we found our path to full inclusion impeded.

The Jewish lobby even denied the existence of an Arab American community as such, and dismissed it as a fiction created simply to wage an anti-Israel campaign.

While some progress was made during this period, grave difficulties remained. Beginning, however, in 1984, with Arab American involvement in both the Jesse Jackson for president campaign and Reagan's presidential campaign, things began to change.

The Arab American Institute (AAI) was founded in 1984 by Arab American Democrats and Republicans in order to further the process, of bringing Arab Americans into mainstream US politics. At first, pressure was applied to candidates to reject our support and to exclude us from political campaigns. As we sought to enter the mainstream, we were perceived as even more threatening and the pressure to exclude us intensified. But as Jesse Jackson reminded us at the time, "the biggest threat you pose is not the threat to quit and walk away, but the threat to stay around and fight." And fight we did.

In 1986, AAI published a booklet called "The Politics of Exclusion". In this study we detailed how the campaigns of several politicians discriminated against Arab Americans: by rejecting our contributions, refusing our endorsements or attacking their opponents because we were participating in or contributing to their campaigns. This booklet received significant press coverage. In the years that followed, every time candidates treated our community in an undemocratic way, we protested publicly and received press coverage and public support.

In the 1988 presidential campaign, we made a real impact in both parties. We elected a record number of delegates in national and state party conventions. On the Democratic side, we succeeded in winning enough seats and supporters to pass resolutions supporting Palestinian statehood in 10 state conventions, and we had the first ever debate on Palestinian rights at the National Democratic Convention in Atlanta.

After initially experiencing some difficulty breaking into the Clinton campaign in 1992, Arab Americans fought back and gained access.

In many ways, the Clinton White House has been supportive of Arab American involvement. We have been involved in political issues and legislative initiatives, like the budget proposal and health care reform.

There are still huge challenges facing us. The negative stereotypes our opponents created to discredit the Arab cause have now become public policy. FBI harassment, airport profiling and other forms of discrimination must be addressed in addition to the on-going struggle for a balanced Middle East policy. But the path to overcoming all these problems is the same path we have been following for the past two decades. Voting and participation in politics are the most important issues for us right now, because no other issues will be addressed until we are stronger as an American voting constituency. There is no short cut. It is the only way for us to succeed.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Did Marxism distort Marx's thinking?

Just back from the Paris meeting held to mark the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** describes some of its highlights

According to the advance literature sent to participants, the programme of the Paris meeting commemorating the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* had been designed to "favour the maximum of discussion". True to its word, the meeting provided a forum for an open debate that helped cast new light on many of the issues of our time.

The debate centered on four main themes, each of which was addressed in a number of workshops. A look at the titles of the issues raised is sufficient to gauge the seriousness, depth and contemporary character of the debate. For example, the first theme, "Communism, a specter that is haunting history: the *Manifesto* in its period and ours", dealt with the following issues: the *Manifesto*, global and historic context; meaning and position of the *Manifesto* in Marx's work; the post-October 1917 regimes in Eastern Europe, were they a materialisation of the teachings of the *Manifesto*? the 1968 protest demonstrations thirty years later, were they a challenge against the dominant state of affairs? the abolition of slavery and the *Manifesto* 150 years later.

Nor were the issues tackled in the context of the second theme, "the icy waters of egotistical calculation — the social reality of the time of the *Manifesto* to the issues of today" any less interesting: "Bourgeois and proletarians": 150 years later, what class relations in the world? From the Industrial Revolution to contemporary technological transformations: the future of the social division of labour; overcoming unemployment, job security and training for all; the urban issue; What globalisation? domination of finance capital and 'economic wars', or new types of human cooperation? Does the Nation have a future? social transformation and sustained development: human/ecological relations.

The third theme, "Theoretical intelligence of the historical movement as a whole" dealt with the following issues: is history intelligible? do economics allow us to understand the dynamics of history? domination, power, exploitation: obstacles to a theoretical intelligence and to transformation of society in practice; calling progress into question; from criticism of the present to aims for the future: projects, utopia, modelling; socialism and/or communism? communism and the individual.

Finally, the fourth theme, "A world to win: what actors for what 'revolution'?" dealt with such momentous issues as: Democracy, a revolutionary issue? What internationalism? Can the State be 'captured': reforms, revolution, processes; the question or property: ownership, powers, management; the emancipation of women and the communist project; from the 'Communist party' of the *Manifesto* to the complexities of present day political organisation.

Thus the meeting touched on a wide variety of complex problems, many of which represent audacious departures from the line of Marxist orthodoxy. It was a forum for a wide spectrum of intellectuals of the Left, from reformists to social democrats to communists to Trotskytes to the far left. The individual papers sent in advance of the meeting filled up ten large volumes and represent a cross-section of leftist thinking today. This substantial literature constitutes an exceptional collection of reflections that are useful not only in explaining the past but also in exploring the shape of things to come.

An important contribution in this respect came from the Uruguayan scholar, Juan Grompone, who submitted two papers. In the first, he contends that history has never witnessed sharply polarised societies composed of only two 'pure' classes, but that there were always intermediary classes between them. Noting that in all big historical transformations, as for example that from slavery to feudalism and, later, from feudalism to capitalism, the main beneficiaries were one section or another of these intermediary middle classes, he questions why socialism should be an exception to the rule by transferring power from one extreme, the capitalist class, to its antipode, the working class. It was more likely, he reasoned, for the shift to work to the benefit of the middle classes, even if they called themselves something else.

In his second paper, Grompone likened the long history of Marxist thought to a three-act play, which goes through three distinct moments. The first act, or moment, ended with the death of Karl Marx. Until then, his teachings were the absolute authority for the international Left on all philosophical, economic and political questions. In fact, Marxism was nothing but Marx's teachings, encapsulated in his famous thesis that thinkers should not only contemplate the world but also change it. According to Grompone, the second stage began after Marx's death, when his name was used by a variety of trends in the revolutionary working class movement to justify their respective policies in opposition to the policies of other such trends. The very idea of making Marx the frame of reference place his thinking above history, in contradiction with his philosophy based on 'historical materialism', which postulates the primacy of the material movement of history over all thought, however outstanding the thinker.

After Marx died, the word Marxism was coined. After Lenin died, Marxism became Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism was coined even before Stalin's death, and its disappearance soon after betrayed a basic flaw in the very idea of such a sequence. For a long time, people believed that Marx's contention just before his death that he was not a Marxist was nothing but a clever play on words; it is now clear that the statement meant much more than that.

The teachings of Marx were never identical to those of Lenin; nor, for that matter, were Lenin's teachings identical to those of Stalin. Marx believed that the expansion of capitalism to englobe the entire planet was a progressive phenomenon, in that it would widen the scope of countries, peoples and nations ushered into history; for Lenin, on the contrary, this phenomenon which entailed imperialism and colonialism was a negative development, which accelerated the need for proletarian revolutions.

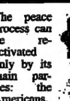
Stalin attributed himself to Leninism to consolidate his position and facilitate the liquidation of other leading figures in the revolutionary movement. His objective was therefore reactionary and terroristic in character, and had nothing to do with the teachings of Marx, a fact which became obvious to everyone after the Mao-Khrushchev rift erupted in the open.

Marx's teachings, as made clear by the *Manifesto*, were based on the theory of class struggle, that is, class against class, not a world bloc of states against another bloc of states, or one military camp against another. The outcome of the confrontation did not depend on how progressive the ideas that inspired it were, but on how threatening to the survival of the species the arms race it triggered was. This development, which made out of Marxism a practice running counter to the teachings of Marx, justifies Grompone's bid to take Marxist thinking into a third stage to liberate it from the constraints of 'Marxism'.

A story worth recounting is how the *Manifesto* became world famous, how this small pamphlet of only 23 pages, which has been issued in more editions and translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible, passed practically unnoticed when it was first published during the revolutionary days of February 1848, in only one language, German, and in only one edition of no more than 2000 copies. It was not until 1872, after the Paris Commune, and the savage repression by France's right-wing Versailles government of what Marx called the first proletarian revolution in history, that a group of French Socialist émigrés published a French translation of the *Manifesto* in new York. The text was used to propound the theory that behind the outbreak of the Commune stood a dangerous conspiracy headed by Karl Marx, who was living in exile in London. It was this false claim that made the *Manifesto* famous, thus showing that historical necessity can assume the most unexpected forms, and seldom occurs in ways that can be predicted beforehand.

What you shall reap

By Naguib Mahfouz



The peace process can be re-activated only by its main parties: the Americans, the Palestinians and the Israelis. While it is not involved in the conflict, the US is the only external party that can move the peace process forward, by holding tenaciously to its most recent initiative. On the Israeli side, some concrete change must occur, either by a change in the position of the Likud government, or by a change of the government itself. The Palestinians can be as effective in energising the peace process: any person, carrying no weapon but his fury against injustice and abuse, can conquer an armed oppressor.

If no real endeavour is launched on the ground, the situation could go up in flames any minute now. Riots and turmoil have become the order of the day, as a direct reaction to the human rights violations of the Likud government. It is outrageous, unjust and totally inconceivable to hear the Palestinians being blamed or reproached for everything they do. If everybody seems to abandon them, how will they ever be heard? If they seek to capture the world's attention with a despair distilled in the bitterness of everyday life, can we blame them?

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

Greetings from Ramallah

Sir- I have just gone over the 14-20 May issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Congratulations on an excellent issue, especially the supplement on 50 years of Arab-Israeli struggle. The supplement interview with Heikal is very good. My salutations to Amira Howeidy and Omayma Abdel-Latif. I enjoyed reading Hani Shukrallah's piece on haggling over land. Brilliant use of *hisbeh* idioms. Also Yunan Labib Rizk's piece on Ottoman Zionism (from *Al-Ahram* archives) was very illuminating. Please inform Prof. Rizk that Palestine and Lebanon were not part of Greater Syria as he asserts (except in the cultural sense). Most of Palestine was part of Wilayat Beirut. The southern part was an independent district called Mutassarifiyat Al-Quds Al-Sharif — governed directly from Istanbul. A minor quibble in an otherwise wonderful paper.

You have a wonderful team of writers. Please give them my greatest esteem. *Al-Ahram Weekly* sells like hot cakes when it arrives in Ramallah. The issues disappear on the same day of arrival.

Salim Tamari
Professor of Sociology
Birzeit University
Ramallah, Palestine

A sporting chance

Sir- Sports have been ignored for years in our schools. Physical education has never been treated as an important subject on the school curriculum. It is often thought of as a waste of time. Physical education instructors often feel they are second-class teachers, whose role in the school is by no means essential. The time allotted to physical education in our schools, limited and insufficient as it is, is often taken over by other subjects.

The painful fact is that very little has been offered to our poor children, especially in primary schools that are supposed to be the cornerstone in any real endeavour to reform our deteriorating education system. Due to the increase in the number of students every year, the space and time provided for play and sports in our schools have become so limited that children are often deprived of any real opportunity to engage in physical activities.

However, many people forcefully advocate the notion that physical education (games, sport and exercise) is inherently meaningful both at the personal and cultural level. Many researchers now believe that there is a direct relation between physical activity and intellectual performance among children. Most teachers would agree that students who take part in physical activities perform better academically than those who do not.

Unless we do something to change the state of physical education in our schools, we will find ourselves, as usual, well behind the others.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

Stories of dispossession

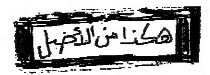
Sir - I would like to join my voice to those who have already written regarding the special pages on Palestine, aptly titled "50 years of dispossession". With the fanfare made in the West dominating the media, it would be all too easy for Anglophones — or Francophones, for that matter — to believe that Israel's is the only side to this tragic story of state-building. Every nation-state spawned its fair share of violence while coming into creation — unification, after all, is a messy business, requiring the subjugation of those with independent aspirations and minds. The creation of a state implies the eradication of local dialects, the imposition of a centralised system of knowledge and truth, and the establishment of an official history. All these are acts of violence. Rarely, however, has a colonial state been as effective as Israel in masking these and other acts of cultural and military brutality. It does us good to remember, however painful the process may be. For those in the Diaspora, and for other Arabs, memories signify responsibility. We all know someone related to Palestine in some way, however remote: the friend whose parents were thrown out of their house, the cousin whose wife wrote a book on the 1948 War, the grandparents who lost everything, the refugees smiling from a picture... The pictures and articles that chronicle the occupation are invaluable in piecing together what we have lost. The idea that Palestine was a land without people is ridiculous, of course. Yet so is the belief — surprisingly widespread, even among non-Palestinian Arabs — that it is the Palestinians who sold their land. What percentage of the population of Palestine owned land to sell? Real historical research is necessary before we can answer this question. In the meantime, telling the occupier's version of history is no solution.

Medhat Barsoum
Garden City
Cairo

All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



Indonesian President Suharto may not be pleased at the media attention he is receiving these days, and I drew him accordingly, torn between disapproval and dismay. Will he be able to restore order? Surely Indonesia cannot just go back to business as usual. Here, the president's face seems to be undergoing a transformation, a subtle shift in boundaries: down and out. His teeth, apparent through his loose, downturned lips, could be bared in anger, or in fear. His eyes are half closed against the flames in Jakarta. Only his black cap stands to attention, starched and crisp.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Lessons from Indonesia

The representatives of the fifteen nations who met in Cairo last week watched on television, and probably heard from President Suharto himself, the details of the events that led to the social and economic crisis in Indonesia. Suharto was forced to cut short his visit to Egypt and fly home immediately to address the explosive situation. The turmoil in Indonesia is an aftershock of the economic and financial collapse that has hit Asia so hard.

The bloodshed in Indonesia, the burning and looting of shops and the violence that claimed scores of lives: these were the results of both external factors, related to the collapse of the stock markets in Asia, and domestic policies. Mistakes committed by the regime cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. The Malaysian prime minister's cry of conspiracy theory is not sufficiently substantiated.

In fact, the opposite seems to be true. President Suharto replaced President Sukarno in the aftermath of domestic turmoil and bloody massacres staged against the Chinese minority some 32 years ago. Brought to power by the army, he was widely praised by the West for restoring stability and promoting economic development in Indonesia. The "miracle" lasted for three decades. This support did not wane immediately: the International Monetary Fund even came to his rescue in the most recent crisis in a bid to save his regime.

The fundamental problem, and the major stumbling block for the endeavours of most developing countries, remains how to achieve the delicate balance between economic development and political reform. The regime in Indonesia remained in the iron grip of the president, who in turn derives his support from the military. The regime made no allowance for the development of political life in Indonesia: it failed to encourage the emergence of a multiparty system and the free exercise of democracy as a means of acceding to power. Suharto allowed only the emergence of an elite made up of his sons and their cronies in high officialdom and big business. They formed power centres and took control of major projects, investments, banks and companies. One of the IMF's conditions was the dismantling of these power centres and the purging of corruption and nepotism.

Once Indonesia had been helped out of its financial crisis by the IMF, Suharto braced himself to protect the interests of his family, thus guaranteeing the loss of whatever popular support and national backing remained. He sought to force new burdens on his people to remedy the devastating economic crisis. The hitches in the price of fuel and certain basic commodities unleashed an outburst of fury against the president and his family.

These accumulated errors, compounded by corruption, mismanagement and dictatorial government, led to a state of chaos which the president had little time to address. On his return to Jakarta, Suharto endeavoured to restore law and order to the capital, and to clamp down on riots and violence against the Chinese minority, by turning to the army in an eerie echo of the incidents which heralded the downfall of his predecessor.

How far can measures designed to calm or repress popular anger succeed in rescuing this huge country from a dark fate? Has the time come for genuine political reform in Indonesia? Or will the army be called in once again to restore order to the streets of Jakarta?



Soapbox

In the balance

Until the mid-'70s, four major ideological and political trends were still competing over the mapping of the Arab world's future. Of these, two were "fundamentalist", namely the Islamist and the pan-Arab nationalist trends. The other two, the liberal and Marxist trends, were Western in origin.

During the '60s, pan-Arabism integrated the concept of class within its discourse, formulating its strategy in terms of creating a unified socialist Arab state, led by the Arab working classes. The Marxists were happy to reconcile their internationalist perspective with pan-Arabism. There were Islamists who tried to reconcile liberal democracy with Islamic *shura*, while the liberals adopted the notion of a "social role" for private property.

The June 1967 defeat, the movement toward peace with Israel, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the second Gulf War all undermined the pan-Arab and Marxist trends. Interaction ground to a halt. The Islamists stopped trying to modernise, the liberals turned their back on the social role of private property. The Arab nation became an arena of struggle between savage liberalism, concerned solely with the pursuit of profit, and inflexible Islamist fundamentalism.



This will be the status quo in the Arab world until the pan-Arab nationalists and Marxists are able to renew their ideas and regain their popularity. Only then will there be a balancing force, which, by presenting a sufficiently powerful challenge to the two other trends, and through interaction and free competition, will oblige them to move toward moderation.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a columnist and a leading figure of the Egyptian left.

Salah Eissa

Behind the mirage

The US has been turning the other cheek with alarming regularity as Netanyahu's insults grow increasingly virulent. Hassan Nafaa wonders where it will all end

Recent shifts in US-Israeli relations have reached the point of absurdity. The US is now fully aware that the peace process is on the verge of collapse as a result of Israel's intransigence, which compromises US interests and undermines its international prestige.

A few months ago, the Israeli cabinet decided that the next stage of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories would be the last, that under no condition would Israel pull out from more than nine per cent of the West Bank, and that the process could only start when Israel's "long list" of security demands were met in full by the Palestinian Authority. For its part, the Authority contended that Oslo and all subsequent agreements commit Israel to withdrawal from the entire West Bank, with the exception of the settlements and East Jerusalem. Withdrawal was to have been implemented in at least three stages, regardless of the percentage of land returned during each stage. The process was to have been completed before final status talks began. To bridge the gap between both positions, the US proposed, inter alia, a 13 per cent Israeli withdrawal from occupied land in the West Bank, to be followed immediately by final status talks.

Netanyahu, however, was not about to accept any American proposal that was not a carbon copy of the Israeli position. He therefore requested that the US administration refrain from officially declaring a US initiative before securing the agreement of the Israeli government. The request was a bid to avoid bringing differences out into the open. Israel intended to put paid to the US proposal, rendering it ineffective and thus ensuring that it would be tailored to fit Israeli perspectives. Time would also be gained in the hope of obtaining fresh US guarantees, and to ensure that no independent American manoeuvres take place during the final status talks.

Netanyahu interprets any withdrawal from occupied land as a security problem for Israel, rather than an honouring of Israel's commitments to its agreements. In line with this logic, Israel alone is capable of determining its security needs, and the area of land from which its "defence forces" can withdraw. Netanyahu, however, is also convinced that there can be no conflict between US and Israeli interests. The Israeli prime minister concludes that the US must adjust itself to Israeli policy considerations. Therefore, he is intent on persuading the US to agree with Israel. So what does the president of the only superpower left do?

Even before the Western media publicised the US initiative, the US president was addressing the Israeli position with marked caution, and possibly some fear. This is despite the fact that Clinton clearly finds the Israeli prime minister repulsive, and understands that Netanyahu's manoeuvres are designed to embarrass him and restrict US policy options. Clinton allowed European officials to explain to Israel the dangers of its intransigence. But Netanyahu insulted the British foreign secretary, cancelling the official dinner that was to be held in Cook's honour. The latter had dared to make a token visit to Jebel Abu Ghneim, thus arousing Netanyahu's wrath. Clearly, Britain's record of dedication to and support of the Zionist cause and Israel were not enough to make up for the "mistake". Instead of expressing anger or indignation at this diplomatic and very public insult, the British prime minister chose to bend before the storm. This enabled him to return to the region a few weeks later, carrying the US message that London would host the discussion of the US initiative. Further, Blair was successful in convincing both Netanyahu and Arafat to meet for separate talks with US Secretary of State Albright in London.

When details of the US initiative were released, Israel vented its anger against the US administration. The move was perceived by Tel Aviv as a form of indirect pressure. At the same time, it became clear to the Americans that they could not suggest less than 13 per cent, because that would be rejected by the Palestinians. Once the figure was released by the media, US acceptance of a withdrawal from less land could only mean they had succumbed to Israeli pressure. Netanyahu had no choice. The Israeli prime minister never formally accepted or rejected the initiative — for many reasons, including the fact that the US itself never mustered the courage to make it official. He has seized every opportunity, however, to arrogantly object to anyone "dictating terms" to Israel. With the Palestinians out of the debate — since Arafat had approved his approval of the US initiative beforehand — the main players were the US and Israel.

The tension reached a crescendo during the London meeting. Secretary Albright then decided to invite Netanyahu and Arafat to Washington to meet with the president. The meeting was perceived as a signal that final status talks were about to be launched, provided the parties agreed to the US initiative. Netanyahu argued that he could not respond to the Washington invitation before consulting with the US envoy to the Middle East to clarify a few matters. Again, the US acquiesced. Netanyahu then refused to go to Washington unless substantial changes were made to the US initiative — specifically, with regard to the percentage of land to be handed over to the Palestinians.

Strangely enough, Clinton did not react. But in a question-and-answer session with school children, covered by the media, Mrs Clinton expressed sympathy for Palestinian demands for a state of their own. She said that such a state could be effective in bringing stability to the region, and catering to the security needs of its peoples — particularly the Israelis. Netanyahu then declared war on Clinton, challenging him openly on his own turf. The US congress was mobilised to unprecedented extremes. The president was accused of bias towards the Palestinian Authority, and of compromising on Israeli security. A majority in congress urged Clinton to refrain from imposing solutions unacceptable to Israel. At the same time, the US media mounted a fierce campaign against the president. It was as if he had committed an act of high treason.

Netanyahu did go to Washington — to meet with Jewish organisations and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Israel. Clinton reacted by changing Secretary Albright's schedule, requesting her to stay behind instead of accompanying him to the G-8 meeting in Europe. This climax of absurdity clearly illustrated the reality of power relations between the US and Israel. The stage is set as follows: the Israeli prime minister arrives on a private visit to Jewish Americans, and the secretary of state of his host country implores him to find some time to meet her. At first he refuses, then accepts, only to reject the US initiative once again. Secretary Albright again alters her programme in order to be granted another meeting. Her demands, however, are rejected. Netanyahu then haughtily emerges, makes the rounds of research centres and Jewish media institutes, and describes his disagreement with the US as "family squabbles at the dinner table". He will continue with his plans for the West Bank despite any difference in opinion with the United States, since it is no one's business to decide for Israel what it should do.

It has become clear that Israel is exercising pressure on the US, which must give in to its long list of demands. These demands include the power to determine unilaterally how much land will be handed over to the Palestinians, new US guarantees that it will refrain from ever exercising pressure on Israel during the final status talks, and a declaration by the US that it opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state, now or in the future. In fact, Clinton is now expected to publicly announce that he differs in opinion with his wife regarding the issue of a Palestinian state. Does Israel, backed by the Zionist movement, exercise hegemony over the US, and consequently the world order?

To answer this question, a brief review of the history of the relationship between Zionism and Israel, on one hand, and the forces which dominate the international scene, on the other, is in order. Regardless of the rallying effect of its legendary ideology, Zionism would not have flourished had it not been supported by world powers. The success of the Zionist movement lies in its ability to tie its interests to those of the great powers, especially the forces which have the greatest leverage in the Middle East.

The Zionist movement chose to depend completely on first the British, then the US, role in the Middle East. The benefits were mutual, of course. Whenever a conflict of interest arose with a superpower, Zionism was up to the challenge. Such conflicts, however, were only temporary.

From Suez, the Zionists learned never to place their full trust in others. As a result, the Zionist movement has always drawn on its own resources to pressure decision-making centres. Particularly after the Suez crisis, the United States became the target of the Zionist lobby, which sought to convince every US administration that whatever serves Israel's interests serves those of the United States. The Zionist lobby had to prove to the US that it was its closest ally. As a result, the US has tolerated Israel's departures from good taste — small matters, such as spying on friendly countries.

Israel and the Zionist movement have sometimes been mistaken in their reading of the international scene, and have occasionally lost out in global power shifts. Israel's long-term plans to manipulate the US administration from within, however, seem brilliant. Yet errors may be in store in the future if it continues to be driven by arrogance.

US-Israeli relations after 1973 clearly indicate that all US administrations have been able to bring limited pressure on Israel when it comes to specific US demands. For its part, Israel has been able to survive such pressures by rendering them virtually ineffective. It seems, however, that the hour of truth has come. Israeli arrogance under Netanyahu's leadership seems simply foolish, and this could push the American public toward a choice: their interests in the Arab world, or those of Israel. The coming weeks or months will show if Israel will be able to convince the American public — not just the administration — that US and Israeli interests are one, even if this entails sacrificing peace. If Netanyahu succeeds, then he, not Clinton, will be the leader of the new world order.

If this should happen, it may sow the seeds of anti-Zionism — and even anti-Jewish feeling — within the US. In any case, much depends on the Arabs' caution in managing their relations with the US. They must be totally aware of the need to leave no vacuum on the US scene for Israel to fill. Many issues vital to the Arab-Israeli conflict will be settled in America before being settled in the Middle East. It is a long struggle, but laughing last is always best. After all, there is only one reason to pursue the mirage called the peace process: to show Israel, once and for all, in its true light.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — The enemy's the same

The on-going celebrations in the West of "the Jew" *self-realised*, in the state of Israel, as Superman may be ironic. That they are not equally shocking, or even surprising, is testimony to the structural limits of Western liberalism, and to Zionism's deep roots in the imperial and fascist traditions of modern Europe.

The Western leaders' impassioned messages of congratulation to the "exceptional people of Israel" on the 50th anniversary of the 20 per cent-Palestinian/Arab-"Jewish state" had an almost cathartic feel — as if, and this the greatest irony of them all, the guilt of the Holocaust provides just the right cover for the free expression of the most vulgar forms of Western racism. So long, it seems, as today's Arabs are cast as yesterday's Jews, and today's Jews are cast as yesterday's blue-eyed Aryans, can the inhibitions of late 20th century liberal civilisation be done away with, and the true Western "self" — baptised in the blood of "Indians" from the new and old worlds — be given free expression. Not the allegedly all-powerful Jewish lobbies, nor even the admittedly inimitable services that Israel has provided for the interests of Western imperial hegemony in the Middle East during its 50-year-long history can explain the genuinely ecstatic tones in the voices, cracked with emotion, of Western "celebrities" speaking of the "miracle" that is Israel. Release the collective libido of the imperial West, it seems, and you get, not a pre-civilisation "savage", but the crazed settlers of Hebron.

What I find interesting about the "Israel at 50" extravaganza, however, is not all the hype, but rather the haunting presence of the Palestinians and the fact of their dispossession, in spite of it. More interesting still has been the equally haunting sense of finality, of a circle closing, as '48 came to meet '98. As historic coincidence would have it, Israel approached its 50th anniversary at a time when its original project was coming close to its ultimate fulfillment. But since the Jews of Israel are neither supermen nor demons, the moment of "realisation" — not of some abstract, inherent and unchanging "Jewish" nature but of a specific political strategy expressing particular interests — has also been the moment of the crystallisation of the basic contradictions of the Zionist colonial project. Zionism could come into its own only by laying bare its fundamental nature: its inherent contradictions, razor sharp for all to see.

And the one contradiction that tops all contradictions in the Zionist project is that of Palestinian dispossession. The irreconcilable opposition between a Zionist state and Palestinian self-determination, indeed mere Palestinian existence, is now glaringly apparent, no longer as the result of Arab "rejection" of Israel, but as an expression of the Zionist project's success, of Israel's fulfillment. The issue of Jewish/Israeli security which was at the heart of the Oslo process from the start is the concrete expression of this irreconcilable opposition. One merely has to look at the peace process discourse from outside to realise immediately that, for the dovish Peres, no less than the hawkish Netanyahu, a free and sovereign Palestinian people is a threat to Israeli security, and that an essential condition for the security of the Zionist state is the dispossession and subjugation of the Palestinians.

There is where it all began, and this is the point to which it has returned as the 50-year circle comes to a close. A fascinating historical dialectic has been at work. "If I had to say what is the day, the one day, that peace became possible in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbours, I would say that day was 12 June 1967. Because on that day, Israel pushed the border from the suburbs of Tel Aviv to the banks of the Jordan, across a stone wall a thousand metres high, the mountains of Samaria and Judea, and made peace possible because it made successful conquest impossible." Netanyahu said to resounding applause while in Washington last week.

June '67 set in motion a process which worked for almost 30 years to deny, indeed to make disappear, the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948: the Arab governments accept Resolution 242, effectively recognising the Zionist state in its pre-June '67 borders; in 1971 a series of articles signed by a "Palestinian leftist" (Hawatmeh) suggesting an "interim" two-state solution, appear in *Al-Hurriyya*, the organ of the DFLP; Arafat is known to have given his secret blessing to the articles: the transition of the mainstream Palestinian movement towards adopting a two-state solution is set in motion; immediately in the wake of the October War, the majority of Palestinians adopt a two-state solution, leaving out a number of increasingly isolated and largely aimless "rejectionists". Kissinger is in town, the "peace process" is launched: the Palestinians and Arabs are given one dramatic lesson after the other in "realism" — not least in the invasion of Lebanon in '82, or the "break their bones" policy in the occupied territories; and by the time we reach Madrid in 1991, there is almost no Arab state, Palestinian organisation, or prominent Palestinian intellectual or political figure that does not adopt a two-state solution.

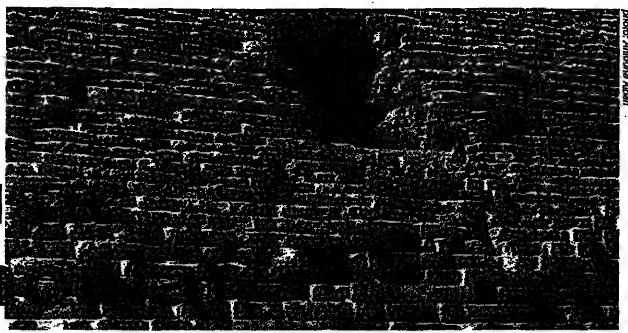
But the two-state formula was adopted in a certain way, in terms of "realism", of seeking what the militarised Palestinians misnamed "a political solution", and not in terms of justice and fundamental rights. It was adopted as a strategy not of struggle but of negotiations, learnt from within the "peace process". The basic effect was to hide the original sin of Israel's establishment. Indeed, the Palestinians were thrown totally on the defensive, for it could justifiably be argued that "you had the West Bank and Gaza, including East Jerusalem, why didn't you build your state then?" Palestinian dispossession was made to disappear, fundamental Palestinian rights were transformed into a territorial squabble. Palestinian political leaders were transformed into bare-foot international lawyers, appealing to this, that or the other commitment under this, that or the other "spirit" or "text" of multitudes of international resolutions, agreements and accords, including accords designed to implement previous accords, and yet more accords designed to further implement implementation accords. The 9-13 per cent farce was an apt finale to this process.

But here the always surprising dialectical nature of historical processes makes itself felt. The culmination of the "process of pacification" of the Arabs — launched in June '67 and specifically designed to force them to acknowledge and legitimise the dispossession of '48, in return for some form of alleviation of the dispossession of '67 — hurled them straight back to the dispossession of '48. At the end of the long and torturous road of the peace process we are back at the fundamental Zionist axiom: "A land without a people for a people without a land". The Palestinians are not a people with fundamental rights, but a demographic problem to be solved. Their existence is antithetical to Jewish "self-realisation", to Jewish "security", to the Jewish miracle that makes barren land bloom. And since the past 50 years have failed to make the Palestinians physically disappear — not for want of effort — they must be "disposed of", subjugated, besieged, controlled, beaten again and again and again into submission.

One state or two, the battle is now, as it always has been, against Zionism. The coincidence of an anniversary, which by its very nature revives memories of the past, has merely underlined what historical process has created on the ground.

David Blake interprets music that speaks

Mu
ora


photo: Antoine Albert

Opera Concert at the Pyramids; Malvina Major, soprano, Hassan Kami, tenor; Brian Law, tenor; 15 May 1998

When the oracle speaks through music it is up to us to listen. During the last week it has spoken unmistakably at the Cairo Opera House. So, in all fairness to this much maligned institution, the hits should be noted as well as the misses. The two concerts reviewed here were hits, full centre and palpable. Someone has his eye on the sparrow — things arrive here freshly dug or mined from the huge, muddled pudding of European music. It is to Cairo's advantage and pleasure to have such performances as these two have been. The great pity is that the audiences for both were so small.

That of 15 May was held at the Sound and Light area of the Giza Pyramids. Old grievances hold fast; this place is not really for serious musical performance, particularly when a beautifully accoutred major opera house lies empty in the dark of Zamalek.

And on the 15th Cairo was in the throes of one of its deepest passions — an Ahly/Zamalek football match madness. Despair and euphoria, Cairo heaved, and some of the emotions naturally reached as far as the Pyramids Plateau. Even the Sphinx, gleaming white in its new beauty mask, was put in the shade.

And the performance? An operatic recital by Malvina Major, soprano, and Hassan Kami, tenor, with the Cairo Opera Orchestra as accompaniment, consisting mostly of bits of Puccini carved from *Tosca* and *La Boheme*, with delicate cuts from Verdi and Gounod around the edges.

It began with a mystery. What happened to the Cairo Opera Orchestra, a brave little body which did marvels with *Thais* recently? This night it moved off into space, leaving the two singers to face the spaces mostly without any ardent support at all, with the audience waiting in vain for the great silky swirls of Puccini. In this case the singers went bravely on in the characters of their music, perfectly audible and visibly, at least, undisturbed. And where was the Cairo Opera band? Sucked into the space channels and wind currents of the drag net of the cliff sides of the pyramids. It is not Wall Street up there, but neither is it a suitable place for song. So, the two voices carried on alone with brave gasps from the orchestra when present. The canyons surrounding the Sound and Light are really too deep for reliable amplification.

Malvina Major, the guest, a New Zealand singer, proved formidably victorious. She showed she was a lady who held all the shots, and she fired them one by one. Everything from a singer's armory was displayed without trace of mannerism or hesitation.

She began her part of the performance with the Jewel song from Gounod's *Faust*, and showed brilliantly where she stood and with what. She has the lot. This song is not like bird music, but fully dramatic, with *coloratura* added to help the situation. Major plunged into it with relish: fast tempo, sweeping phrases, ending with a splendidly articulated trill and a run-up to the high soprano finish. Her jewels were real, and it was all done with ease. Marguerite was there on stage, and the sounds of Ahly's struggle on the playing fields of far Heliopolis rang out from radios in the valley.

The soprano followed this with an aria from Catalani's opera *Le Wally*, loved by dramatic sopranos for its rich toned drama. Major made it sound grand and dark toned. She has a long voice, very grandly held from low to high and a strong, vibrant middle.

Hassan Kami began his singing with Manrico's aria from *Il Trovatore Ah, si ben mio*. Like everything in Verdi's opera it needs a great singer because the magnificence of the music gleams darkly, full of menace, but is born aloft by an angelic tune. And so here is Hassan Kami, with a highly charged partner, space, dramas on stage and off, and the barracking crowds up the valley. He is not young. Everyone knows his life story. He willingly leaves himself wide open for any harshly phrased criticism. But really, on this night, there could be none.

Like the soprano he produced the lot: the opening melody, golden, and a purple stained heroic tenor voice, musically noble, rising to the big, expansive climax. From where does all this expertise come? He is moody, can drop the whole apparatus of opera singing and still sing. Then, one night, one spark ignites him and the whole thing — life force, sheer love, whatever — all fuse and Kami is Kami again. He is loved and he gives love in return. He gave, and splendidly, this night.

So this happy concert took flight. Two singers with a born sense of occasion and the means to deliver gave perfect pleasure.

The second half brought Puccini's *Tosca*. This was the best thing of the evening. Kami sang beautifully, young, easily, with laughter in the voice. Major made Tosca an important character, sophisticated in the ways of the world, but longing for the pleasures of Cavaradossi and her weekend alone with him in her place in the country. What style the two singers gave *Tosca*. Puccini glittered. They behaved like two people in grand expensive clothes making an entry to a party, while underneath the carpets, dark depths loomed.

The end brought what is called the most popular of all operas, *La Boheme*, a small tragic dish, moist with tears, which satisfies football-sized audiences, with 30,000 people at one sitting. No need to look for football in Heliopolis. Kami got past his big aria in easy style. Mimi's song about flowers real and false caught Major about to bring her first aria to a close as a landing plane blinking like an electric rabbit made a low swoop. Not to be put down, Major pressurised her power, sailed up and landed victoriously.

The *Traviata* Brindisi, the first encore, was an object lesson. Both singers and the conductor of the evening, Brian Law, went for the old way of doing the Verdian Rumpty-Tum. They did not ignore what others regard as bad taste, but revelled in it as Toscanini used to. They slowed the tempo, the Rumpty was huge, and the voices came out rich and joyous. It gave class to the party and lustre to Verdi — nothing flippy.

More encores. Viennese operetta in proper idiomatic style. No one wanted to leave. Why didn't they give the Miserere from *Il Trovatore*? Perhaps next time, same duo, but in the Opera House.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Master Symphony X; Vinh Pham, violin; Dominique Fanal, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 16 May

The last time the oracle spoke was on 16 May in the Cairo Opera House.

The evening began with a new piece by W S Basha called *Steps Rewind* for orchestra: difficult title, difficult music. Then came the *3rd violin concerto in B minor, op 61* of Saint-Saens, finishing with the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz.

Cairo music is gong through a period of adjustment which is affecting music everywhere — everything caught in the flux, with a proliferating technology spreading over everything like a voracious creeper. Almost everything these days can be unacceptable — classicism, pre- and post-modern, all going into the same machine.

Cairo's central cultural heartbeat is the Opera. It does a blanket job, conveniently covering almost all kind of musical output. These multifarious events are hard to control or direct, but now and then, almost without any advance publicity whatsoever, musical happenings, revelatory visitations which do great justice to the eyes and ears of the Opera house sneak through the wires and the webs. These events do justice to the instincts of the Opera House which can refute the usual whinings of people who complain about everything it does, but are seldom there to listen to any of it.

The oracle does speak and some people do listen. For example, a small opening is being created for French music here, a change of landscape from the impenetrable Germano-Russian wall. Recently, Roberto Cominati played Saint-Saens *2nd piano concerto*, and there was an unforgettable concert of Chausson.

And now, on 16 May, another irresistible call for the attention of lovers of French music with a new young player, Paris born Vinh Pham, as violin soloist. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Dominique Fanal, another first visit. This combination was part of the oracle speaking. It could be the beginning of a passionate affair between Saint-Saens and the small but attentive audience as Fanal and his soloist wove their way through a unique masterpiece seldom heard here.

Pham is a treasure. He plays without any of the usual classic formalities of the professional violinist. Tall and elegant, his person is reflected in his playing: relaxed, but as alert as a flying fish poised for the jump. He is what is exciting about young European players of these days. With the most disarming intimacy they aim straight for the listener's acuteness, which is flattering but also a challenge. They do not stoop or solicit — their understanding is deep and strange, almost visual. Pham's playing of Saint-Saens showed how it was a miracle such music came from a France encapsulated between awful walls, yet with the civility of its surface remaining intact. Pham's lovely tone clove lovingly to the delicate bending forms as they moved up and down the levels of the music.

The last words of the oracle were the sounds of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Whatever you expect of this work it always turns out to be more marvelous than ever. Fanal produced revelations. His keenness and careful attention to the slightest details which build up the grandest edifices, lit by lightning flashes with romantic visions tumbling out over the four movements, drove the music headlong forward. Art, music particularly, goes ruthlessly over everything, power, politics, good and evil, to a sort of perfect beauty. Everything in the *Symphonie* gets a chance: harps swooping dottily through sound waves of unbearable richness, oboes, corps anglais, the mad loved-crazed poet and his muse. Everything is there, but nothing has a name. It is music, opening hells and paradisial bliss at the end.

Dominique Fanal deserves our obeisance for his unique offering of sheer Berlioz which is a palliative to the ominous absurdity of existence.

Art

A more real surreal

Polemics and painting: **Nigel Ryan** on Ramses Younan

Among the 37 signatures attached to Georges Henein's 1938 manifesto, *Long Live Low Art*, we find that of Ramses Younan. And again, in 1940, in the bulletin accompanying the first Art and Freedom exhibition, Younan's name is once more writ large. Practically two decades later, following his return from France in 1956 in protest against the Tripartite Aggression, we find Younan publishing an essay defending the internationalising aims of Art and Freedom, the group that had played such a prominent role in his career.

"True Egyptian art cannot exist," he writes, "until our heritage interacts with the international heritage: only then will a truly modern art be established... We should not be afraid of any innovation no matter how extreme... those who refuse such innovation with the pretence that they are defending our national identity reveal only their own lack of faith in our potential for growth."

There can be no disputing Ramses Younan's position as a polemicist. Until his death in 1966 he occupied an important position on the Egyptian art scene, championing the new and the challenging until the end. Indeed, in the year of his death he published an article in *Al-Ahram* lamenting the conservatism of contemporary practice and blaming the moribund state of Egyptian art on a cultural bureaucracy headed by individuals incapable of distinguishing between the valuable and the banal, and on an intelligentsia determined in their belief that the visual arts had nothing to do with culture.

It is not, however, Younan the propagandist that forms the subject of the current exhibition at Espace but Younan the painter. Admittedly the show is modest, containing only a small number of works, the majority from the '40s and '50s, yet on this particular showing it is difficult to account for his profound influence on the kinds of modern art practiced locally.

This is not to deride the paintings included in this particular exhibition, merely to point the difficulties of contextualising such works today. The dates preclude any of the earlier, surrealist pieces, though surrealism was to be an abiding influence. More important, perhaps, was Younan's move towards abstraction, a move that coincided with several of his contemporaries including, most importantly, Fouad Kamel, to whom Younan was close.

It seems important, here, to state the obvious. By the 1930s artistic taste had moved sufficiently to accommodate the academism of orientalists and their local counterparts but little else. To speak about a taste for the figurative is to overstate the case and it is against this background that


Ramses Younan

one most gauge the revolutionary impact of Younan and his associates' embrace of an increasingly abstract vocabulary.

One of the more remarkable things about the painting of Ramses Younan is the restricted palette with which he was to articulate this vocabulary. In the current show are a couple of larger paintings in which a residual landscape remains, smeared in muddy ochres and grey. Yet these are positively gaudy compared to a number of smaller works. Indeed, perhaps the two most impressive pieces on show are completed in the tonalities of grisaille, a dark: spindly creature, perfectly modulated, an essay in the potential of monochrome, and a dark, sepulchral labyrinth exploring little beyond black and white. Typically, the mystery in which these images appear to be shrouded appears as a hangover from his earlier surrealist days.

The same applies to two pieces from the late '50s, completed in acid orange and black, across which crawl the creatures of nightmare, a contemporary reworking of what happens when reason sleeps.

In a smaller number of pieces colour is introduced merely as a foil, as a means to better emphasise spatial ambiguities or else to complicate the reading of form. The residually figurative, filtered through a sensibility that for a time had been in thrall to the tricksiness of the surreal — an appeal, admittedly, mitigated by political concerns (Art and Freedom took the freedom half of the equation seriously) — is seldom far from the surface, and in one painting a fanciful if disturbing Heath Robinson contraption appears to be being operated by a creature with fantastically elongated arms, a kind of human praying mantis.

It takes a colourist of rare sensibility to achieve such subtle modulations as Younan with such severe, self-imposed restrictions. And one cannot help but begin to wonder why the palette never really expanded. Perhaps a clue lies in a small painting from the late forties. The background, completed in the dun tonalities of early, analytical cubism, resolves itself into the formal disposition of Rayonism while across the surface paint is splattered with the kind of metaphysical gesturing later to be associated with the New York School. So much, and in such a small work. Younan's embrace of the international was necessarily so capacious that perhaps no room was left for colour.

Ramses Younan, at Espace. For full details, see Listings

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Hamed Abdalla
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 21 May
Selected works 1953-83.

Hassan Abdel-Fattah & Salem Salah (Paintings)
Khan Al-Maghraby Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9.30pm. Until 21 May.

Naseeb Baroody & Mooneer Anis (Photographs)
Foyer of Al-Ahram Building, Al-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786 100-400. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 22 May.
Recent works under the title I Love Egypt.

Palestine 1923
Mubarak Public Library, 4, El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tue, 11am-7pm. Until 23 May
Rare photographs of Palestine in the early 1920s taken by Rudolf Lehnert.

Vivi Sylvan
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 May.

Ramses Younan
Espace Gallery, 1, Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thu 10am-2pm & 6-9pm. Until 24 May
Works by the painter, writer and pioneer surrealist.

Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 24 May.

Best Book Bindings 1997
Cervantes Institute, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 11am-8pm. Until 28 May.

Fathy Afifi (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Downtown. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 May.

Alexandrian Artist
Foundation of Hellenic Culture, 18 Sidi Al-Metwalli St, Al-Attarin, Alexandria. Opening 21 May, 7.30pm. Until 4 June.

Mervat Refaat & Irene Revel Thiele
Sheba Gallery, 6, Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Fri, 10am- 8pm. Until 6 June.
Images of Sinai and the oases from the former, abstract batiks by the latter.

Mohamed Ghunim (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Downtown. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 6 June.

Robert Capa (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 11 June.
36 photographs by one of the century's most celebrated photojournalists.

Ketty Abdel-Malek (Mosaics) & Sameh El-Bannani (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 25 May, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 12 June.

Brecht Posters
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm, Fri 8 am-noon. Until 15 June.
Exhibition of original posters of Brecht productions to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Mohamed Abla
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm, Fri 8am-noon. Until 15 June.
New paintings and installations under the title The Nile.

Mahmoud Hamed
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Opening 24 May, 8pm. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 18 June.

Faenza Ceramics
Museum of Modern Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Opening 23 May, 7pm. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 25 June.
100 original precious pieces tracing the history of Faenza ceramics from the Middle Ages until now.

Art For All
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until end of June.
Works by over 20 artists.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1, Kafour Al-Akhshidi St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10 am-6 pm
Egypt's largest collection of 19th century European art

FILMS

Agnes Varda Film Series
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
26 May, 8pm: Uncle Yanco and Les Demoiselles Ont Eu 25 Ans.
27 May, 8pm: Du Côté de la Côte and La Pointe Courte.

Italian Films
23 May, 7pm: La Caduta Degli Dei (1969), dir L. Visconti
24 May, 7pm: Storia Di Piera (1983), dir M. Ferreri

Notice:
Commercial cinemas change foreign films on Wednesday and local films on Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Will it ever sink? Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslet.

George of the Jungle
MGM Kolleyet Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

As Good As It Gets
Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Breakdown
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Thur & Fri midnight show.
Starring Kurt Russel.

Murder at 1600
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Palestine 1923

Mouse Hunt
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.

Fools Rush In
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Dantella (Lace)
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo, Sarrai Al-Azbakia St, Off Ahmed Urabi Sq, Downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssra and Elham Shahin quarrel over the same man

El-Batal (The Hero)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Gabr Al-Khawater (Consolation)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal with High Honours)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 7460. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Round Trip)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

DANCE

Carmen
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 27-31 May, 9pm.
Performed by the Puerto Rican ballet troupe Concerto.

La Compagnie Linga
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 21-24 May, 8pm.
Presenting "Sweet Night" with live music by Leon Francioli and Daniel Bourquin and "Concerto", a Bach composition, with dancers Katrazyna Gdaniec, Tamara Bacci, Marco Cantalupo and Krassen Krastev.

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 21 May, 9 pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Orientals
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 May, 9 pm.
Fathy Salama's troupe performs.

Opera Anas Al-Wogood
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. Until 22 May, 9pm.
The Cairo Opera Company and the Cairo Opera Orchestra perform with soloists Iman Moustafa, Nabila Erian, Neveen Alloube, Reda El-wakil and Hossam Moustafa; conducted by Youssef El-Sisi.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 23 May, 9pm.
Dvorak's Symphony No 7 in D-minor op. 70, Wieniawsky's Concerto for Violin & Orchestra No 1 in D-minor and Bajoras' Exodus No 2 performed by Medhat Abdel-Salam (violin) and conducted by Servetikas Robertas.

Drums Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 24 May, 9pm.
Ahmed Rabie performs.

Piano and Violoncello Concert
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 24 May, 8pm.

Academy of Arts
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 25 May, 8pm.
Performing musical selections with brass instruments.

Jazz Concert
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 25 May, 9pm. Akhnaten Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. 26 May, 6.30pm.
The Christof Lauer Trio performs.

Ancient Coptic Music and Songs
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 27 May, 9pm.
The David Group performs, directed by Georges Kirollos.

THEATRE

Our Country's Good
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 21 May, 8pm; 22 & 23 May, 6pm. Reservation is necessary.
Scripted by Timberlake Wertenbaker and directed by Tori Haring-Smith.

Oedipus
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until end of June, 8pm.
Scripted by Jean Cocteau and directed by Mohamed Metwalli.

Al-'Arid (The Model)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 5910954. Daily, 9pm

Khat Ahmar (Red Line)
Al-Tali'a, Ataba Sq. Tel 5937 948. Daily, 10pm

Shakespeare, One-Two
Al-Tali'a, Ataba Sq. Tel 5937 948. Daily, 7pm

Hubb Ma Qabl Al-Rahil (Love Before Departure)
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267/7783. Daily, 8.30pm

LECTURES

Egyptian Artists In Solidarity With The Palestinian People Commemorating 50 Years of Arab Dispossession Since the Establishment of the State of Israel
Al-Salam Theatre, 21 May, 7pm.
Poetry readings, theatrical performances and exhibitions.

The New Novel of the '98 Generation
Cervantes Institute, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. 25 May, 8 pm.
Lecture, in Spanish with Arabic translation, by John Macklin, professor of Spanish at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Leeds University, UK.

Indira Ghandi
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. 27 May, 7pm.
Lecture by Eqbal Baraka, editor-in-chief of *Hawaa* magazine.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

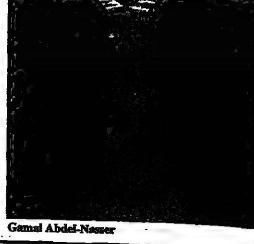
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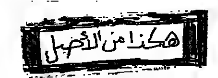
TIME and Space is the title under which paintings by Nazli Madkour are on exhibit at the Centre of Art, Zamalek. Though bordering on pure abstraction, they nonetheless make a nod towards the figurative.

Also at the Centre of Art are sculptures by Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Through the use of such strange materials as dust pans, these attempt a satirical stance towards traditional art forms.

The Goethe Institute hosts mixed media paintings by Mohamed Abla. Colours spill into each other, are almost left to interact without a controlling compositional hand — the life of the Nile, at times polluted, at others brimming with symbolic charge.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri


Gamal Abdel-Nasser



The perfect fit



NOW HE is dead there is nothing left but the voice. All the rest of Francis Sinatra counts as nothing. But you cannot bury a voice. They are nothing, after all, but vibrations. Frank is now far away, out of trouble, except, perhaps, for the tough time the immortals will have at his arrival.

What made him? He had everything — wives, children, flash and flame, swimming pools to dive in, beauties, politicians and the parhelion of the Western world shining bitchily like cyanide in which to gamble. Where was he under all this detritus?

He wasn't under anything. He was on top of everything. He could be ferocious, was frightening and dangerously capricious. So why did the world dote and bow?

Because of his voice. He was a sibyl. Sibyls, historically, are mostly women. A sensual adjustment is needed to fit Sinatra into his rightful niche. Metempiric is a word that fits him perfectly.

Maybe the richest singer that ever lived: Caruso and Melba, his rivals in fame, came nowhere beside him. Sir Thomas Beecham, returning to London after a spell in New York in the '40s, said that Sinatra was potentially a great Otello.

Sinatra's voice contained more than could be recorded. It was a wide voice, able to take stress, risk and strain. And this was part of his uniqueness. He was never a crooner. He sang of love, loneliness and destitution in baritonal tones capable of sounding responsibility, irony and despair. There were no leers with Sinatra.

These qualities made him magnificent, a sound voice of genuine stature. The public life resulting from this voice did not help much. The worldly trappings all slipped away, and will continue to do so, like an avalanche.

Much of his singing wove around the words *tu che le vanitar*. Nothing very festal about this, but it is the musical aspect that will last.

Actor, lover, monster, bully: all merely the work of public myth-makers. Try sweet, lonely, and possessed of that wondrous affliction, a great voice. A haunted person. Would the voice last? It did for Sinatra. The rest is rubble.

Francis Albert Sinatra, singer and actor, born 12 December 1915; died 15 May 1998

David Blake

Going for a song

On Saturday *Al-Ahram* begins a five part serialisation of extracts from a new book by Ragaa El-Naqqash, based on over 50 hours of interviews with Naguib Mahfouz, to be published by Al-Ahram Centre for Translation and Publishing. Here we present, in translation, highlights from the first of the series

It seems to me now that had I received sound guidance I would have chosen music and not literature, and the entire course of my life would have been different. Despite my liking for the plastic arts, I never entertained any thoughts about becoming an artist, but as for music I was so enamoured with it that I could have become a professional musician...

I have never been a diehard fan of any particular genre of song, though generally you find that those who like classical song don't have much time for more modern music and vice-versa. Yet I have always found a great deal of pleasure in all types of singing, the classical and modern, Oriental and Western, popular and country...

One of the most beguiling people I ever met in my life was Sheikh Zakariya Ahmed. As a person he was very much an *ibn balad*, loveable and witty. One amusing trait he had in common with his friend Tewfik El-Hakim was that at any gathering either attended they would monopolise the conversation from beginning to end. The one difference between them was that El-Hakim's subject was invariably himself — reminiscences and anecdotes about his life — while Sheikh Zakariya never said a word about himself but played the story-teller all night long. Listeners might easily imagine that the author of the *Arabian Nights* and Sheikh Zakariya had a great deal in common and shared the same mindset...

I owe my acquaintance with Sheikh Zakariya to a common friend, Salah Zayan, from a stock of country notables. Zayan, who lived in Abbasiya, always invited Sheikh Zakariya to the soirées he held at his house almost every day. I used to wonder how Sheikh Zakariya found the time to work on his orchestrations with these nightly gatherings. Then I discovered that he could make melodies at any available opportunity. I remember he hit upon the melody for Umm Kulthoum's *Habibi Yes'id Awqatuh* while sitting with us. On more than one occasion he would produce two different settings for the same lyric and then ask us which we liked best[...]

He was an incredibly kind man, warm and friendly with everyone, and I never suspected him of possessing the kind of pride that would make him beg to differ with Umm Kulthoum. She used to pay Sheikh Zakariya the same fee as other composers for setting her lyrics. He, on the other hand, felt that his work was far superior to theirs. I witnessed at close quarters the feud between Sheikh Zakariya and Umm Kulthoum and for him it really was a matter of pride.

Sheikh Zakariya did not like reading; *Zuqaq Al-Mada'* (Midak Alley) is probably the only novel of mine he read. He was so taken by it that he would rephrase and narrate it to us almost as if he were the author, retelling it in his hugely funny way that had everybody — himself included — in stitches...

Sheikh Zakariya adored Sayed Darwish to the point of hero-worship. He would talk about him with great passion, never tiring of recounting their vagabond roamings together. Often, Sheikh Zakariya said, they would set out after midnight and rove Cairo's dark alleys. Choosing a low, ground floor window, they would settle beside it and eaves-drop. The man of the house might be in an intimate situation with his wife, and they would listen to these nocturnal sounds that might inspire a new tune...

Sayed Darwish's sudden death was a terrible shock to Sheikh Zakariya. According to his account of the event, Sayed Darwish was writing some music to be played at a reception for Saad Zaghloul. He had booked himself a room in some old hotel in Alexandria so that he could work undisturbed. All alone in the room, he overdosed and bled to death.

To me the story rings true, because Sayed Darwish was in his prime and had a strong constitution, so it must be that he made some such mistake that cost him his life. It's more or less the same thing that happened to Sheikh Mahmoud Sobh, another musician I liked very much. Although Mahmoud Sobh was blind, he loved boxing, weight lifting and motor-bike riding — and his health was good. It seems he overdosed on drugs which caused fatal problems with his blood circulation...

Like Sheikh Zakariya, indeed like all composers of that time, Sheikh Sobh did not receive any academic musical training but learned directly by being apprenticed to a master. It's a method of learning not dissimilar to the way Arabic literature was studied in the past, when a student would attach himself to a well-know scholar, accompany him for many years and acquire knowledge at his hands. Sheikh Sobh had a great talent and a commanding personality, but like Sayed Darwish, drugs undid him.

It was through Sheikh Zakariya that I met the poet and satirical writer Bayram El-Tonsi. We were first introduced at one of Salah Zayan's soirées. I thought that with Bayram in our midst, the evening would be merrier than ever. But the surprise that awaited me was that Bayram was totally different from the image I had of him: he sat in a corner away from us and did not once open his mouth throughout the evening. On the few occasions I heard him speak, he was brief and his words were full of anguish and bitterness, but that was probably a result of the tragedies and suffering he had lived through...

One of the distinctive features of Sheikh Zakariya's music is the authenticity of his Oriental melodies. Nevertheless, he was not against Western music and I never once heard him attacking it, though he considered its flavour totally different from our music. In my own opinion, being open to Western culture does not mean that we automatically forfeit our own authenticity and heritage. And this is why I totally disagree with those who claim that Abdel-Wahab corrupted Oriental music by assimilating influences from the Western tradition and introducing some of its instruments. To me, Abdel-Wahab enriched and developed our music through this Western influence. It was with great skill that he blended Oriental and Western music, weaving them into one harmonious texture... As for others who tried to hybridise Oriental and Western music, I sense a contradiction between the two styles in their work and their musical structures feel contrived...

My fondness for song was acquired in childhood. There was a large collection of records of then famous singers in our house, and on happy occasions singing parties were held at our place. There were two types of song at these parties: the *awalem* performed in a special area for the women while male singers entertained the men in another part of the house. Because I was a child, I moved freely between the two areas, enjoying both types of song at these soirées... I also thoroughly enjoyed the theatres of Rod El-Farag where my father took me occasionally. Rod El-Farag was the summer resort of Cairenes at the time. The theatrical troupes of Rod El-Farag offered imitations of celebrated works by Emadeddin Street troupes and stars — you would get Sayed Darwish operettas, Ali El-Kassar and Naguib El-Rihani lookalikes and so on. In the theatres of Rod El-Farag I watched many imitations of famous shows the originals of which I could not afford to see in the theatres of Emadeddin Street. The theatres of Rod El-Farag started to dwindle when Egyptian Radio began broadcasting in 1934.

Such was my passion for music and song that I enrolled in the Arab Music Institute and studied there for a whole year..., in 1933, while a third year student in the Faculty of Arts, Fouad I (presently Cairo) University... My tutor in *qanun* was the grandson of El-Aqqad, the *qanun* player in Umm Kulthoum's first troupe and the son of El-Aqqad Bey, the director of the institute. I shall never forget a certain incident with El-Aqqad Bey who, because of a speech impediment, would sometimes emit a sound not unlike a snort. The first time I went to the institute I was told to go and meet the director, so I went to El-Aqqad Bey's office and said I wanted to enroll. Asking me to take a seat, he remarked that I was a bit older than the average beginner. When I explained that I was a university student, he consented to my joining the institute as an external student and then asked if I had decided which musical instrument I wanted to study. I said that if the study of a musical instrument was obligatory I would go for the *qanun*. I was startled by the snort-like sound he produced. Was he telling me I had been rejected or that he disapproved of my choice of instrument? I blushed to the roots of my hair and felt very hurt, but I kept my silence. But then he presented me with a form, and while I sat filling it, he snorted more than once and I realised that, far from being deliberate, it was caused by a throat problem...

The late musician Abdel-Halim Nouwaira once told me an anecdote about El-Aqqad Bey. At the celebrations for the inauguration of the Arab Music Institute, to be attended by King Fouad, El-Aqqad Bey had insisted on accompanying the orchestra that would play the royal anthem. Many people tried to dissuade him, arguing that his bizarre snort might take him unawares and because the theatre would be very quiet, it was inevitable that the king would hear the snort and might well take it as a personal affront and decide to close down the institute before the inauguration. But El-Aqqad Bey refused to budge from his position, promising that he would barely allow himself to breathe, that he would restrain himself, keep a grip on his voice until the end of the concert. He kept his promise, but no sooner had the concert ended than he hid behind the curtain and did it — as if it had been curbed and had now broken free.

As for El-Aqqad senior, El-Aqqad Bey's father, he was the most accomplished *qanun* player of his time and one of the most notable members of Umm Kulthoum's first troupe. I heard him play at Umm Kulthoum's concerts held at the Majestic Theatre... in the 1920s, which I attended regularly until I entered university, after which the venue for Umm Kulthoum's concerts became the Ezbekiya Gardens.

At the Majestic, Umm Kulthoum would start with a "monologue", as they used to refer to her solo songs, then sing a song based on a poem, and end the concert with a *taqtouqa*... But when radios came in, I found I preferred to listen to Umm Kulthoum's concerts on the café radio, particularly since the price of a ticket to an Umm Kulthoum concert kept soaring. Eventually, just getting hold of a ticket became difficult...

Although I loved Umm Kulthoum, I did not know her personally and only once did I actually speak to her. This was at the party at *Al-Ahram* newspaper held in my honour when I turned 50 in 1961. Mohamed Hassanein Heikal had invited her to attend and she accepted without hesitation, which surprised me. I never imagined she would accept so easily to attend what was essentially a literary celebration, because I didn't think she took an interest in the novel or the short-story, though I had heard that she was cultured and enjoyed poetry...

At the beginning of the Umm Kulthoum era there was a singer whom I consider one of the best female voices Egypt has known — Mounira El-Mahdia. Her voice was the same pitch as Umm Kulthoum's or perhaps slightly lower. I saw Mounira El-Mahdia perform twice. The first time was in a dramatic performance with Youssef Wahbi at the Ramses Theatre. The second was one of her public concerts that I attended with my friend Ibrahim Fahmi De'bis, on which occasion we discovered we were the only two young men in the audience, the rest being elderly people. Taken aback, Ibrahim asked me: "What on earth made you bring us here amid all these old people?" And when Mounira El-Mahdia started singing, it was clear that age had left its mark on her. She would sing for a while, then break into a cough. After that concert, she announced that she had given up singing. I therefore had the honour of having attended the last concert of Mounira El-Mahdia, for whom I have always had deep admiration and respect.

Mounira El-Mahdia had risen to fame in the theatre when the theatre itself was at the height of its glory. Indeed it is to Mounira El-Mahdia that Adel-Wahab owes his fame. Sayed Darwish's sudden death had prevented him from completing the orchestration of *Cleopatra*, so Mounira El-Mahdia asked Abdel-Wahab to complete the task and gave him the male lead opposite her, despite the fact that Abdel-Wahab was a young man, the age of her own sons. This was the turning point in Abdel-Wahab's life, the big break that spared him years of struggle and hardship...

In my youth I entered into heated debates pitting myself against such people as Dr Hussein Fawzi who were all for Western music and totally against Oriental music, the ideal place for which, in their opinion, was the trash bin. It was — and remains — an article of faith with me that Oriental music is a great art.

Mounira El-Mahdia

Umm Kulthoum

Translated by **Hala Halim**

Plain Talk

These days everybody seems to be preoccupied with questions of identity. It may seem paradoxical that while the world is now witnessing a move towards globalisation, such a national tendency surfaces. Or it may not be really paradoxical; it is, perhaps, as a reaction to this move that the question of cultural and national identity is raised.

The recent UNESCO conference on this question, which convened in Stockholm, came out with some interesting results. Its main declaration, under the title "Revised Draft Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development," comes up with some important points which, in my opinion, reflect the ambivalent situation of culture.

I shall quote just one item from over 60 which seem to reflect the dilemma we are facing.

"Today's emerging trends, particularly globalisation, link cultures ever more closely and enrich the interaction between them, but they may also be harmful to our creative diversity and to cultural pluralism; they make mutual respect all the more imperative."

The other items also reflect the difficult situation faced by the Third World. Certainly the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the bloody events in former Yugoslavia contribute to this, and the chauvinism which is currently all the rage in the bits and pieces of these two former countries are efforts to retrieve identities lost under totalitarian systems.

Cultural prejudices are nothing new. Here in Egypt we have been through them, not least the historical competition between Britain and France in the educational and cultural fields. They reflect the ever existing clash between Anglo-Saxon and Latin cultures. Egypt has benefited from this competition and managed to quaff from both cultures. What is more we have no feeling of inferiority towards either cultures, which makes us shrug our shoulders to the so-called cultural invasion.

Egyptians are not searching for identity; they are affirming their identity. This is reflected in the great efforts expended on the conservation of monuments, be they Pharaonic, Coptic or Islamic.

In a recent meeting of the National Council for Culture, Arts, Literature and Information a report was submitted about the preservation of historical Cairo. It is a comprehensive report which can be used as an introduction to this great city. Cairo was founded in the year 969.

The report deplores certain maltreatments of Old Cairo and is critical of the process of urbanisation and the erection of modern buildings which clash with the old buildings. It is only recently that monuments other than the Pharaonic have featured in the preservation programmes. Quite a number of houses in historic Cairo have been renovated and have become tourist attractions. But, there is no doubt that, by and large, the Islamic monuments have not attracted as much international attention as the Pharaonic ones.

Of course there are a great many problems that stand in the way of the process of preservation, which the report of the Council recognises. Chief among them is the fact that historic Cairo remains primarily a residential area, home to many thousands of citizens, many of whom also make a living in the districts in which they live. Apart from the damage to the monuments as a result of drainage and water seepage day to day life itself constitutes an obstacle in the way of any preservation work. This is why the report proposes, among other things, the creation of a special bureaucracy for historic Cairo which should be composed of representatives of a number of ministries as well as experts in Coptic and Islamic archeology. The report also recognises the important role that can be played by NGOs in spreading awareness about the importance of safeguarding the incomparable architectural heritage of the area.

What was significant in the Council meeting, which I had the pleasure of attending, was the presence of the governor of Cairo, who intelligently commented on the report and vowed to carry out the proposals.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram Weekly

21 - 27 May 1998



Randa Shaath **brings words and pictures back from a country different, yet the same: a land where celebrations are a way of resisting, where daily life is still a struggle. The soldiers' guns, the settlers, the borders and checkpoints are there: but there are concerts, too, makeshift playgrounds, kindness and a kind of hope**



Where the streets have names



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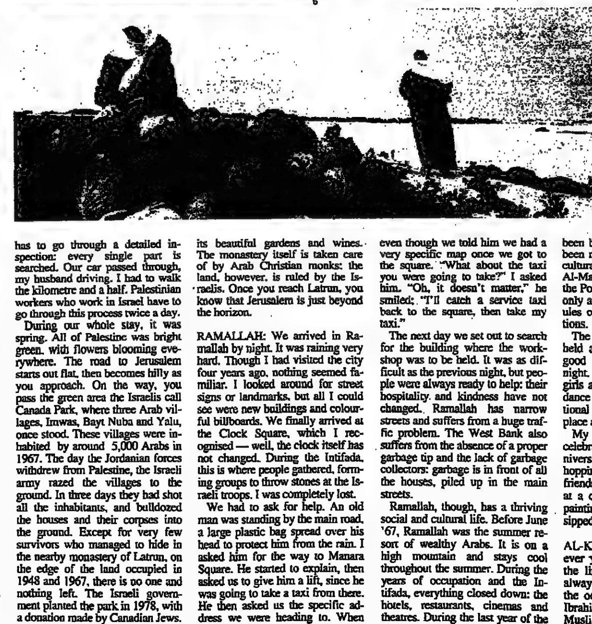
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I have been back to my homeland many times. My first long trip was in 1990 during the Intifada. I went back and applied for my right to a Palestinian ID in 1994, when limited self-rule began in Gaza and Jericho. I have made several short visits since then, my last trip a year and a half ago. Although I notice many changes every time I go, difficulties remain. Crossing the borders is still difficult. Even if it is just routine work, with no illegal documents or problems, the process takes at least four hours. Palestinians who have the right to citizenship in the new self-rule areas have been able to apply for their new Palestinian IDs. Once they have done that, the Israelis cease to recognise any other form of identification and can treat them as Palestinians — that is to say, as badly as possible.

I could no longer use my Egyptian passport; other Palestinians can no longer use any foreign passport they obtained during their years in exile. We are no longer allowed to obtain a visa to enter Palestine and Israel. I had to stay in Gaza: I was not allowed to enter Israel, or even the West Bank under Palestinian rule, except with a special permit that is very difficult to obtain, and only when I am in Gaza. My American husband, who accompanied me on this trip, was also treated differently. Americans are usually given a three-month visa at the border. This time he was only given a one-month permit because he was going to Gaza first, even though he mentioned in his application that he was a journalist on a two-month assignment.

For this visit, we decided to drive to Palestine with his car, which has Cairo licence plates. Palestinian cars in Gaza have a new green plate, different from the blue plate numbers which begin with a different letter for each city in the West Bank, and also different from the yellow Israeli plates. Cars with Gaza or West Bank plates are not allowed into Israel. The yellow Israeli plates are not allowed into Gaza. I had been asked by the Swiss Cultural Centre to assist in two photography workshops in Palestine. I had to spend three weeks in Gaza, and three weeks in Ramallah, in the West Bank. A car with Egyptian licence plates and an American husband made it possible to move around the Holy Land.

GAZA: After the long, tiring drive and the complications at the border between Cairo and Gaza, a good surprise was waiting for me. The garbage that recently filled the streets and beaches of Gaza had disappeared. There is a garbage can every hundred metres. Roads have been paved, and flower pots decorate the small tiled squares. Big colourful billboards and posters decorate the main streets. Street signs in Arabic and in English now lead you to where you want to go. The streets have names now: during the Intifada, Palestinians knew the houses only by the names of their residents in order to make it hard for the Israeli soldiers to get around.

During the long years of occupation, Gaza was completely neglected. The first time I visited Gaza, in '94, garbage filled the whole strip. The streets were sand that turned into mud in winter. Graffiti, used instead of newspapers to express the ideas, politics, and concerns of the people, covered the walls.

New schools, hospitals, recreation areas and parks have been built. High rises and tall buildings dominated the small, beautiful houses. I noticed more women going to work in fashionable modern clothes. They seem to enjoy a more open social life. Gaza's inhabitants seem more relaxed now that they no longer have to deal with the Israeli occupation forces on a daily basis. Now, the crime rate is almost nil.

The newly built airport is beautiful: a Moroccan-style building, with tiles and arches, and white cornices. Hundreds of Moroccan workers have been working day and night on it for months. The Arab Contractors built the main edifice. It is almost finished, but will not be used until an agreement with the Israelis is reached.

I visited the airport with my husband and Thomas, the Swiss photographer who was giving the photography workshop. Our trip coincided with two school buses carrying a hundred school girls on a field trip to the airport. The girls surrounded the flight engineer and bombarded him with questions ranging from technical issues to political comments. I was daydreaming about the day this airport starts working. It will be a more human solution than the land borders. It would allow us to go to the West Bank without having to cross the Israeli border. After their questions were answered, the girls recited poetry, sang songs, and took photos of each other in front of the control tower.

PASSING THROUGH EREZ: We stayed in the Gaza Strip for the three entire weeks, since crossing the border between Gaza and the rest of Palestine is agonising. To go from Gaza to the West Bank one has to pass through Israel. That means you need a permit to pass through the Erez border (the border between Gaza and the rest of the country), which is an excruciatingly long, painful experience. To obtain such a permit I needed my valid ID and a security check from the Israeli authorities, a process that could take weeks or months to obtain. Even if all the documents are in order, the Israeli authorities still demand a "convincing reason" for your departure.

Before Palestinian rule, since Israel controlled the whole area, the procedure was simpler and did not take all this time. Today, some Palestinians can no longer leave Gaza. We were allowed to cross over in the car: the foreign licence plates helped out here. Palestinians from Gaza who want to go into Israel cannot use their cars, which have green licence plates. They need to leave the car in the parking lot at Erez, and walk through a tunnel one and a half kilometres long. Then they have to look for an Israeli car with yellow plates to carry them on into Israel. If a Palestinian car manages to get the necessary permit to cross the Erez border, it has to go through a detailed inspection: every single part is searched. Our car passed through, my husband driving. I had to walk the kilometre and a half. Palestinian workers who work in Israel have to go through this process twice a day.

During our whole stay, it was spring. All of Palestine was bright green, with flowers blooming everywhere. The road to Jerusalem starts out flat, then becomes hilly as you approach. On the way, you pass the green area the Israelis call Canada Park, where three Arab villages, Imwas, Bayt Nuba and Yalu, once stood. These villages were inhabited by around 5,000 Arabs in 1967. The day the Jordanian forces withdrew from Palestine, the Israeli army razed the villages to the ground. In three days they had shot all the inhabitants, and bulldozed the houses and their corpses into the ground. Except for very few survivors who managed to hide in the nearby monastery of Latrun, on the edge of the land occupied in 1948 and 1967, there is no one and nothing left. The Israeli government planted the park in 1978, with a donation made by Canadian Jews.

The Latrun Monastery, founded in 1890, was built on a hill dominated by the remains of a Crusader castle where Richard the Lion-Heart took refuge. It is famous for its beautiful gardens and wines. The monastery itself is taken care of by Arab Christian monks: the land, however, is ruled by the Israelis. Once you reach Latrun, you know that Jerusalem is just beyond the horizon.

RAMALLAH: We arrived in Ramallah by night. It was raining very hard. Though I had visited the city four years ago, nothing seemed familiar. I looked around for street signs or landmarks, but all I could see were new buildings and colourful billboards. We finally arrived at the Clock Square, which I recognised — well, the clock itself has not changed. During the Intifada, this is where people gathered, forming groups to throw stones at the Israeli troops. I was completely lost.

We had to ask for help. An old man was standing by the main road, a large plastic bag spread over his head to protect him from the rain. I asked him for the way to Manara Square. He started to explain, then asked us to give him a lift, since he was going to take a taxi from there. He then asked us the specific address we were heading to. When we said we were going to Al-Tireh, he sighed: it was two kilometres away from the square we were heading to. He insisted on coming with us to our final destination, even though we told him we had a very specific map once we got to the square. "What about the taxi you were going to take?" I asked him. "Oh, it doesn't matter," he smiled; "I'll catch a service taxi back to the square, then take my taxi."

The next day we set out to search for the building where the workshop was to be held. It was as difficult as the previous night, but people were always ready to help: their hospitality and kindness have not changed. Ramallah has narrow streets and suffers from a huge traffic problem. The West Bank also suffers from the absence of a proper garbage tip and the lack of garbage collectors: garbage is in front of all the houses, piled up in the main streets.

Ramallah, though, has a thriving social and cultural life. Before June '67, Ramallah was the summer resort of wealthy Arabs. It is on a high mountain and stays cool throughout the summer. During the years of occupation and the Intifada, everything closed down: the hotels, restaurants, cinemas and theatres. During the last year of the Intifada, there was only one pizza restaurant, which opened for two hours during the day because of the curfew. Since 1994, however, tens of new restaurants and cafés have been built, many old houses have been restored and transformed into cultural centres and art galleries. Al-Matal, Ziryab, Al-Sakakini and the Popular Arts Centre, to mention only a few, have year-round schedules of films, lectures and exhibitions.

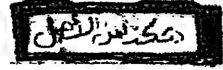
The photography workshop was held at the Arts Centre, where a good new film was shown every night. The Centre also trains young girls and boys of different ages to dance *Dabka*, the Palestinian national dance, so music filled the place all day long.

My husband and I were about to celebrate our first wedding anniversary. We ended up bar-hopping, then met a couple of friends at Ziryab where we looked at a collection of fine Palestinian paintings by different artists and sipped mint tea as music played.

AL-KHALIL (HEBRON): Wherever you go in Hebron, you feel the lingering tension. There was always tension in Hebron during the occupation. The fact that the Ibrahimi sanctuary, sacred to both Muslims and Jews, is in the centre of the city, adds to the tension. Even though Hebron is officially under Palestinian rule, the Israelis, not satisfied with all the settlements they have built there, keep confiscating more Arab houses in the middle of the Arab city, and insist on living in them. After the massacre of Palestinians during dawn prayer in the mosque in 1994, some 100 Israeli families decided to reoccupy several houses that had belonged to Jews before 1948. Over a thousand Israeli soldiers came along to "protect them from the Arabs".

As in all markets in old Arab cities, Palestinians sell their goods in small, Ottoman-style stalls. What is different in Hebron is that Israeli soldiers, fully armed, stand on the roof-tops of all the buildings. They patrol the narrow streets just in case the "Palestinian terrorists" attack the Israeli inhabitants. A new road, restored at great expense by the Palestinian Authority with money from USAID, is now closed to Arab cars, because one of the houses recently claimed by Israelis is close to the road. No matter how many Palestinians live there, and no matter how old or sick they are, they have to walk down to their houses while Israeli soldiers watch, and sometimes search them as they go.

My husband and I visited Hebron on the second day of the Jewish Passover feast. No one besides Jews was allowed to visit the Ibrahimi shrine for a whole week. As















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1 and 2. Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives; 3. In Ramallah, the traditional *mansaf* cooked for *Eid*; 4. *Dabka* training in Ramallah; 5. A lettuce plantation in Qartas, a small village near Bethlehem; 6. Children from the Deir Ammar Camp swimming in Ain Al-Zarqa, Ramallah; 7. Waiting for a taxi on the road to Nablus; 8. Dura Camp, Hebron; 9. Greenhouses in Wadi Gaza; 10. Near the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem; 11. Market women protesting at the Municipality: after the end of occupation, women have found voices they had lost; 12. Salaheddin Street in Gaza: one of the last streets still bearing reminders of the pre-autonomy period, it is now being restored; 13. Galaa Street, one of Gaza's largest streets. This is the face of the new city: high-rises and paved roads where small houses and sand streets once were

we stepped out of a local restaurant serving *falafel* and *fuul*, we ran into one of my students and his wife in the street. They lived in Dahriya, a village near Hebron. While I was introducing them to my husband, a group of Israeli children, aged between four and six, came up to us and started calling us names. They held small pebbles in their hands, waved in anger, and then started spitting in our direction. Palestinian children use stones because they have no other weapon with which to defend themselves. Two Israeli soldiers, three metres away from us, watched these Israeli children with pride.

BETHLEHEM: In Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, are the cave that held the stable where he was born, the shepherds' fields, and beautiful churches. Bethlehem is a sad city — a city that thrives on visitors, and suffers from their absence. Palestinians from Bethlehem and neighbouring Bayt Jala are not allowed to leave their small cities. At the same time, they are not allowed to host tourists, or guide the very few of them that manage to come. As we drove along, we noticed that, at the entrance to every West Bank city now under PA rule, there is a huge Israeli billboard warning tourists not to enter because of the "dangerous Arabs". Another large sign prohibits tourists from entering individually. Organised tours have to check first and coordinate their visit with the Israeli army — i.e. pay the fees to the Israelis instead of the Arabs. The sign is illegal and contravenes all the peace treaties signed between Israel and Palestine.

During the Israeli occupation, there were 6,000 certified tourist guides in Palestine and Israel. Of these, only 39 were Palestinians.

Even though Bethlehem suffers from all these handicaps, there is a sort of an excitement to the city, a breath of hope in the air. The Palestinian Authority, with the aid of the World Bank, the European Union, the UNDP, and UNESCO, is organising an international year-long festival for 2000. World-famous composers and musicians are scheduled to perform in Manger Square. The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism is also building a school of tourism and hotel management to increase the number of Arab guides. This will allow the Palestinians to tell their own history to the guests who are expected. Old sites, streets, houses, oil presses, wells, and Solomon's Pools are being restored in preparation for the occasion. People from Bethlehem are holding on to this dream. They talk with excitement about their plans for the millennium, and the benefits that will come with it.

NABLUS: I went to Nablus with some friends on the second day of the *Eid*. We went with a very specific goal in mind: to eat the traditional, delicious *kunafa* made there. It takes its fame from the sweet goat cheese made in Nablus and named after the city. We moved from one pastry shop to another, only to find them closed for the feast. Most of the shops were closed, except for toy stores. We were desperate and disappointed, until one of us saw a pastry shop which seemed half open. We ran over and found a young man cleaning the place up. There was no *kunafa* on the big trays — not a single triangle. We told him we had come all the way to Nablus just to have a portion of their heavenly *kunafa*. He called his father from the house, which was just upstairs. The old man smiled to us and told us that, if we waited for 20 minutes, he would prepare us our very own tray. It was worth it: the sweet cheese tucked away in the thin, crunchy brown pastry melted in our mouths.

After we had accomplished our goal, we went for a walk around the old city. There were few women on the streets and most of them, even the younger girls, wore the *hijab*. I was particularly interested in the old Turkish bath with marble walls and floors. Old baths in Palestine are still functioning, and the three I visited in Gaza and Nablus were astonishingly clean. The bath in Nablus serves as a cultural centre as well: weekly concerts are well attended, even by people from outside the city.

We went to Mount Sumara, where a sect of Arab Jews live. They claim to have the most authentic scripts and traditions. They are the most conservative Jews in terms of traditions and beliefs. The mountain was green, and high enough to afford a panoramic view of Nablus. The Roman city and two towers, said to have been built by Salaheddin, were spread out before us. This site is controlled by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and barbed wire surrounds everything. Palestinian children who live around the area and who use the site as a playground and hiding place led us to a gap in the wire. We wriggled in. The view was much better.

JERUSALEM: Every time you want to go to Jerusalem you have to cross an Israeli check point. Of course, you need a special permit to enter the heart of the Holy Land. West Bank cities are all less than an hour away from Jerusalem. Ramallah and Bethlehem are suburbs, a 10-minute drive from each other. The majority of Palestinians have not been able to visit Jerusalem for a couple of years now. Palestinians who live in other cities and used to work in Jerusalem have lost their jobs. The very few who ventured to continue working in Arab Jerusalem take the risk every morning of being returned home, or are forced to make a long detour. They also risk being shot by trigger-happy soldiers. While we were there, a minibus full of Palestinian workers returning from their day jobs in Israel was fired on at a checkpoint. Three men were killed, another nine wounded. Their supposed offence? Driving erratically.

The Israeli government continues to confiscate Palestinian land to build settlements. Then they take over roads to secure the settlements, and forbid Palestinians from using these roads, built on their confiscated land. Palestinian land continues to shrink daily. Palestinians who live in different West Bank cities under PA rule cannot even visit each other because the connecting roads go through Jerusalem, and without the impossible permit you cannot come or go. Palestinians are imprisoned in their own small cities.

My husband managed to go to Jerusalem for the *Eid Al-Adha* prayer. We were staying in Ramallah, and he gave three Palestinians a ride to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Cairo licence plates, again, made it much easier to cross the checkpoint. He took his camera with him, excited to document this special day. An Israeli soldier, machine-gun slung across his shoulder, stopped him at the door of the sanctuary: no cameras allowed. The soldier informed him that the camera is an offence to the mosque. What about his boots and weapons? my husband wondered. My husband finally told him to keep the camera while he prayed, which was the main reason for his visit; the soldier refused. The argument went on. The three Palestinians who had travelled with him refused to leave him alone and waited until he was finally able to leave his camera with an Arab guard. Right after the prayer, the man slipped it to him, and he was able to take some photos of the *Eid* celebrations.

Traditionally, West Bankers go to Jericho for the feast. We joined them. Although the city is very small, that day there were hundreds of children riding bicycles between the huge banana trees. Others filled the cafés as they enjoyed *shisha* and mint tea. The air was full of the smell of orange trees and the colours of the children's balloons. Many holidays were being celebrated: the *Eid* and two Easters, Orthodox and Western. In Ramallah, an old festive tradition that was impossible during the Intifada was revived. On both Muslim and Christian feasts, Scouts march through the main streets of the city, decorating them with Palestinian flags and beating drums.

I was lucky that such cheerful days marked the end of my trip to Palestine. Palestinians are celebrating after long years of deprivation: happiness has been rare. Yet the suspicion and fear of what is to come overshadows even these joys. Uncertainty creates depression and tension. The euphoria and high expectations that existed right after the peace treaties have diminished. The final status of Palestine has to be more than a series of isolated enclaves. The daily complications, the hardships, the tension and violence have not made Palestinians forget: in a state of their own, life will be very different.

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

Prudently optimistic

In an interview on the prospects for tourism, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui shared his optimism with Rehab Saad



How do you feel about the tourist situation now?
I feel that things are moving quicker, and more positively, towards normality than anyone expected. I always tend to be conservative; I try to temper the over-optimism and the over-dramatisation of the media concerning the Luxor accident, in a more objective way.

It is necessary for an official to state what is actually happening. That is why I admit that it was a very serious incident; I neither underestimate its consequences, nor overestimate its repercussions. We experienced a drop of 51.7 per cent in tourism in December of last year, but fortunately things moved forward, far quicker than our expectations. In three months time, from January to March, we regained 60 per cent of the arrivals of the same period in 1997, which is considered a 'record year.'

April offered a surprise in terms of the number of incoming tourists, as we regained 86.2 per cent compared to April 1997. Therefore, the total decrease in arrivals during the four months fell from 40 to 33 per cent. If this trend continues, we will attain the objective of the ministry — to return to the normal rate of incoming tourists — perhaps earlier than anticipated.

It is interesting to note that the first three months of this year were particularly alarming, because there were several official warnings, coupled with extensive cancellations by major tour operators working with Egypt. However, it is certainly worth noting that the tourists who visited during the first quarter of this year were mainly individual tourist decision-makers who come to Egypt to see for themselves. They came despite warnings and cancellations of programmes.

Let us bear in mind a few facts: April was an impressive month, and hopefully no more negative warnings or adverse travel advisories are issued; also, we have had a strong recovery from some European countries, as well as strong pick-up from the Arab world; the majority of tour operators have resumed their programmes to Egypt; and finally, knowing that our promotion campaign is going on as scheduled — considering all these facts, one can afford to be prudently optimistic.

"There are three major plans to celebrate the millennium in Egypt. One concerns the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, the second involves celebrations on the Giza Plateau, and the third, a dramatic occurrence to take place at midnight. Tracing the Flight into Egypt has entailed identifying the most important resting places of the Holy Family, and doing the necessary restoration work needed at these sites. The second major plan is an effort to coordinate the various requests of tour operators and international companies for the celebration on Giza Plateau. The third idea on which we are currently working was proposed by the minister of culture. It is to install the missing nine-foot golden pyramidion on the top of the Khufu's Pyramid at midnight."



Would you tell us about your strategy in overcoming the alarming situation that followed the Luxor massacre?
We have conceived a plan of action at four levels. The first is a network of contacts and discussions at the official level which, I might add, is strongly supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to encourage the sending of fact-finding missions to Egypt to assure foreigners of the state of security. We believe it is our duty to have the respective governments see for themselves; to acknowledge that security measures have, indeed, been taken, because their citizens are entitled to every assurance. As a result of these missions, I am pleased to see that the majority of countries around the world cancelled their warnings against travel to Egypt. The only two exceptions are Switzerland and Japan.

The second level of action is with our partners abroad — tour operators and travel agents from the most important markets generating tourism to Egypt. This contact took place through correspondence, by holding meetings and by attending fairs and *bourses* abroad. The aim was to underline the positive steps taken to ensure safety for travellers in Egypt, and encourage them (tour operators and travel agents) to boost their efforts to re-programme Egypt and market our product.

The third level mainly utilises international mass media, especially tourist-specialised media. We've been organising familiarisation trips for people from the media to visit and get acquainted with our tourist attractions, the extraordinary quality of the product we are offering and also to meet with Egyptians to see and acknowledge the fact that they are peaceful and friendly, and that terrorism has no future in such a community of people characterised by tolerance and opposition to violence.

Finally, the fourth level of action was with our partners in the industry here in Egypt. We've been in constant touch with them, exchanging information, supporting efforts in marketing, in organising road shows and attending noteworthy professional gatherings abroad.

The shopping festival being planned for this summer is the first of its kind to be held in Egypt. Can you tell us how it came about?
The thought came as a result of obtaining full information of a successful experience launched in Dubai. Organisers of that festival came to me last year and said that they would be ready to show us how to organise such a festival in Egypt, bearing in mind the differences between the two countries.

The idea was presented by the Ministry of Tourism to the cabinet, which approved it, and a higher ministerial committee has been asked to elaborate on the options and the necessary measures to be taken to ensure its success. The ministries of finance, trade and tourism headed several working sessions together with representatives of the tourism and trade industries, the Egyptian union of industries, union of Egyptian banks, unions of tourism, in addition to concerned authorities and EgyptAir.

During the shopping festival month we are offering packages of reduced air tickets, hotel accommodation, ground services, tours and discounts in shops and malls which have been selected to participate, and there will also be discounts at theatres and restaurants. Finally, and most importantly, cultural and artistic activities will be held for the duration of the festival.

We have already started to market this event and we have strong support from all concerned, including TV, radio and press. Such an event will undoubtedly be a welcome addition to our local attractions.

Some of the recent road shows have been directed to Arab countries. Was this to encourage them to visit during the festival?
No, the idea of road shows is well-known in the marketing of tourism. It was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism in 1994. We launched our first to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, and now we are going again. The idea of the road show is to present, in the limited period of three or four days, a strong message of promotion and marketing; to meet officials, media people, tour operators and travel agents; to permit the private sector to make contacts in order to give a strong boost to their efforts; to listen to their requirements so that we can arrange to avoid obstacles and make their visit to Egypt more suited to their comfort, requirements and taste.

The last road show went to several Arab countries, including Kuwait, Oman and the UAE. I attended the latter, in Dubai, during the exhibition of *Al-Multaqa*. It was very effective and we succeeded in receiving a strong commitment from our partners to work together. We also made deals for the coming seasons.

Normally, the attendance of the minister guarantees media coverage which is very helpful. In addition, I participated in marketing the upcoming Arab season in Egypt this summer, and took advantage of announcing and promoting the two major upcoming events: the month of shopping and tourism, and the Fourth International Song Festival.

The whole world is working on special events for the millennium. Is there anything absolutely unique that we're going to concentrate on in Egypt?
Yes, there are three major plans in progress. One concerns the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, the second involves celebrations on the Giza plateau, and the third, a dramatic occurrence to take place at midnight.

But first, let me say that we presented a written paper to the cabinet last year suggesting the formation of a high ministerial committee to supervise all preparations for the millennium. With the approval of (Prime Minister Kamal) El-Ganzouri, the committee has already met several times. They were mainly examining the suggestions of the minister of tourism which consisted of two major events. The first traces the Flight into Egypt. This has entailed identifying the most important resting places of the Holy Family, and doing the necessary restoration work needed at these sites, in addition to carrying out appropriate infrastructure and environmental preparations.

We have been in contact with the Coptic Patriarchate and an authentic official text has been reviewed by Pope Shenoudah himself. It has been translated into eight languages. A team of photographers traced the major points on the itinerary and have photographed them. Their work on icons, churches, and other attractions have already been sent for colour separation and type-setting and will appear soon.

The second major plan is an effort to coordinate the various requests of tour operators and international companies for the celebration on Giza plateau. I have received at least five serious offers with specific functions, and to decide on the merit of each needs collaboration with the minister of culture and the Supreme Council of Antiquities. In order to make the necessary arrangements, the different functions have to be coordinated. It requires international expertise, music and theatre direction. Michel Jarre, the famous French organiser of the celebration marking 200 years since the French revolution, came to meet the minister of culture and myself, and we are working on this.

The third idea on which we are currently working was proposed by the Minister of Culture. It is to install the missing nine-foot golden pyramidion on the top of Khufu's Great Pyramid at midnight. That event will be the climax of the celebrations that Egypt is preparing for the millennium.

How would you sum up achievements of the past and the prospects for the future?
Egypt is witnessing an exciting and positive evolution in the tourism industry... In fact, since 1982, the year when we regained sovereignty over Sinai and also the beginning of the tenure of President Mubarak, the country has been going through extremely rapid and sustained tourism development.

The economic policy at that time was to start from scratch, especially regarding the infrastructure which was below zero; it was in terrible shape. And that was why Egypt has invested more than $50 billion during the last 16 years to improve the infrastructure and public utilities. This allowed investors to move away from traditional tourist destinations in the Nile Valley and explore and invest in development projects elsewhere. We now have a new and enlarged tourism product, namely, recreational and beach tourism. Earlier, Egypt was purely a destination for Pharaonic sites. In diversifying over a period of time, we can now say that Egypt has a tourist industry.

We have also added other attractions such as conventions, exhibitions, curative and eco-tourism and lake cruises and Nile cruises. As a result, we have been able to create a tourist agenda which includes 30 cultural, artistic, sportive and other events.

After having passed through a successful period of economic reform, incentives, guarantees and legal administration, investors from Egypt and abroad have been encouraged to take part in the tourism developing process. As a result, lodging capacity was raised from 18,000 rooms in 1982 to 75,000 in 1997. And we now have 603 projects under construction.

I mentioned before that we had 665 projects, but as a matter of fact, we have withdrawn the licences of 62 projects because investors did not respect or follow our schedule of implementation. The budget of the 603 projects is estimated at LE31 billion ($9 billion). Within three to five years, we will have an added lodging capacity of 112,000 rooms, which is far below the saturation point because we do not want to over-develop and repeat the mistakes of some other countries who savage their natural resources. We are being very strict in terms of our environment as well as our archaeological sites. We believe that this is the only sound way to develop the industry.

How is Egypt prepared, in tourism terms, to meet the technological challenges of the coming century?
All humanity is engaged in preparing for the coming millennium in technology. We have been making great strides in the last 16 years. We are confident in the future, and there is a trend of extension and development today, of manpower, human resources and strategy.

From the tourism point of view, if we are not leading, we are not far behind in these developments. We have training programmes and scholarships. 'Quality' is the key word in terms of services and environment. And technology in tourism has been introduced in marketing, promotion and advertising. Most important of all, Egypt has 7,000 tourist or travel-related pages on the Internet.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm, LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.40pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal, LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

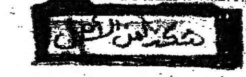
Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians, LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad





photos: Mohamed Wassem

A sea of red flags prevailed Cairo stadium as Ahli dominated the green pitch. For *the first time in* two league seasons Ahli and Zamalek's crucial match towards the end of the season went on smoothly in terms of spectators and players alike. Ahli fans stormed through the streets of Cairo in celebration of their victory against arch rivals Zamalek

Night of the red flags

Ahli quashed Zamalek's challenge in the local derby, putting the red shirts on target for their fifth consecutive football league championship. **Abeer Anwar** reports on the titanic clash

A good part of the country saw red on Friday as Ahli beat the team they love to beat, blanking Zamalek 2-0 and, in the process, taking a giant leap towards its fifth straight league title. With 59 points, Ahli have now built a comfortable eight-point lead over second-place Zamalek. Each club has five more games to play.

As with all Zamalek-Ahli encounters, the media buildup was intense weeks in advance. Fans invented new ways to cheer and some stitched together their own club flags with imaginative patterns. Watched by over 40,000 fans, the two arch-rivals did battle in Cairo Stadium under floodlights, one of the rare occasions the classic has been played at night. As is the norm, Ahli's fans outnumbered Zamalek's.

Zamalek's young squad was in control for most of the first 20 minutes, but other than a well-placed, 18-meter shot taken by striker Kulibali, which goalkeeper Essam El-Hadary did well to parry, Zamalek had few good scoring chances. The more experienced Ahli players marshalled their defence and settled for counter-attacks by veteran forwards Hossam Hassan and Ghanaian Ahmed Felix. When it became clear that Zamalek's offense wasn't all that dangerous, Ahli became the more aggressive up front. It paid off. In the 22nd minute, Felix fired a shot past Zamalek's goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed. The ball had ricocheted off the crossbar following a wicked shot from midfielder and promising newcomer Sayed Abdel-Hafiz.

Zamalek pressed for the equaliser in the second half, which began much the same as the first. And once again, just as it seemed Zamalek was about to put the finishing touches to an attack, Ahli got there first. With four minutes to go, Hassan evaded an offside trap and neatly tucked in the ball to the right of a rushing El-Sayed. Hassan, who turns professional in Turkey at the end of this year, later said the goal was how he wanted to end his season with Ahli.

"The players did their best," said Zamalek's coach Ruud Kroll. "But five of them have never played before. This new team will need some time to gain experience."

Reiner Tsobel, Ahli's new German technical manager, had an easy explanation for the win. "The players stuck to my game plan and applied it."



Ahli played and Zamalek struggled

Ahli fans celebrated their team's victory till dawn. Children waved red flags and stopped cars on the streets to dance. Not in the best of good sportsmanship, some painted their dogs with two red stripes, Zamalek's jersey, and paraded other canines in Zamalek T-shirts. Ahli club was a festive place to be after the match. The doors were opened wide to welcome fans for free.

On the other side of town, police surrounded Zamalek club, which, befittingly, had its lights turned off.

Overshadowed were the other week's matches. Mansoura beat Aswan 3-0, Ittihad defeated Suez 2-0 and Dina did the same to Qena.

Hassan takes 'golden boots' to Turkey

Hossam Hassan, Ahli's and Egypt's most popular striker of the moment, recently signed a contract to play with top Turkish team Altay for the coming season. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

It's time to move on — again. Hossam Hassan, who led Egypt to a successful African Nations Cup campaign this year and Ahli to the top of the national league this season, is heading for Turkey.

Hassan signed a $100,000-contract for one season with Altay, the third best Turkish team, the Arabic daily *Al-Akhbar* reported. His club Ahli has reportedly received $400,000 for the transaction.

Hassan will be the only Arab to play for Altay, which is based in the city of Izmir. The team is made up of mostly Africans and Persians and a few Turkish players.

Altay will participate in the European Cup this year and Hassan is reportedly looking forward to the experience.

Hassan was not available for comment *to Al-Ahram Weekly*. But the Cairo weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* reported that Hassan signed with the Turkish club because some officials he refused to name wanted to force him into resignation again. He reportedly said he is not considering retirement soon.

"I don't think I'm that old yet," he was quoted as saying.

This is the third time the 32-year-old player is trying a professional career abroad. He previously played in Greece and later played for the Swiss team Neuchatel.

The professional stints abroad were a good break for him to think and re-assess his situation. "During such times I regained my confidence," Hassan said in a recent interview.

Yet when he came back to Egypt, he only shone for a while before facing serious setbacks. Hassan faced rejection from some of his fans and some Ahli officials who blamed him for several upsets the team suffered in 1995-96. His fans *also accused him of being careless on the pitch* as the national side lost game after game in continental championships during the same period.

At some point, as Hassan continued facing criticism from his own, there was word that he was considering retirement. Some fans said then that it was about time he quit.

But Hassan, who led Egypt's 1990 World Cup team, refused to go into retirement until he leads the national team to another World Cup.

Hassan's temperament, however, continued to put him into trouble with the national coach and some of his fans. At one point the Egyptian Football Federation banned him for five months besides slamming with a heavy financial fine. Such incidents discouraged many officials of both Ahli and the national team from fielding Hassan.

However, Hassan redeemed himself this year *when national coach Mahmoud El-Gohary called* him to captain the national team in the African Nations Cup in Burkina Farso. He went on to become the co-top scorer of the Cup and his goals saw Egypt lifting the African trophy for the fourth time.

"The national team only won this trophy because they had a coach who understands their potential and needs, and a team which respected their coach and followed his instructions," Hassan said in a previous interview with the *Weekly*.

Some fans were surprised that Hassan signed for a Turkish club, saying he should have been more ambitious and signed for an Italian or French club. After all, he had just proved he was still a top African striker.

But Hassan was quoted as saying that altough he had received offers from Italian and French clubs, none of them were as serious as the Turkish Club which gave him a written offer right away.

His back to Ahli, Hassan looks forward to Turkey

Zamalek makes amends

Following its loss to Ahli in football, Zamalek's basketball team atoned somewhat, adding Egypt's cup to the league trophy. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports on the rare double

It's well-known in sport: Repeating as champions is more difficult than winning the first time. Winning even two consecutive games — in any sport — is not all that easy.

But *this year* Zamalek turned the exception into a rule, bringing home both the basketball league and cup titles. The twin victories, in Egypt's second most popular sport, went some way towards restoring Zamalek's wounded pride. Having lost to arch-rivals Ahli 0-2 in football last week, Zamalek effectively lost all hope of winning the football league. But basketball is a different sport and another story.

Last month, Zamalek deservedly beat Ahli to win the basketball league title before 10,000 fans. And just one day before Zamalek's loss to Ahli in football, Zamalek won the battle of the hoops, defeating Ittihad of Alexandria in Cairo 80-62 to win the cup as well. The first half ended 39-29 for Zamalek.

Zamalek's El-Husseini Samir opened the game with a two-pointer and ended it with a rebound. Playmaker Hisham Abou Serea did his part, scoring three-pointers at will, as did his teammate, famed three-point shooter Yasser Abdel-Wahab. Only Ittihad's Ismail Mohamed had a decent game but his talents did not gel nearly as well with the rest of his teammates.

In the first half, the referee stopped play briefly when rowdy Ittihad fans threw water bottles and even plastic seats onto the court after objecting to decisions made by referees Maged El-Dali and Mohamed El-Werdani. The match was resumed after security men restored order.

"I didn't play with only five players," said Essam Abdel-Hamid, Zamalek's youngest basketball coach ever. "The whole team played well. They were coherent, played with talent and harmony. They played as one and deserved to be No. 1," Abdel-Hamid said.

Last year Zamalek took the league and the cup with two Mali player on board. But an Egyptian Basketball Federation decision this year barred foreign players from playing in Egyptian clubs. For some people, the decision meant the loss of experienced players who add to the abilities of home-grown talent and strengthen the competition. The decision hit Zamalek particularly hard, with many people predicting its doom without its foreign imports.

However, Zamalek played with a mix of old and new players, all guided by Abdel-Hamid, who proved that the team could win two important national championships again — and not with foreigners participating.

Zamalek's board is currently discussing what bonuses the players will get. It is very doubtful that discussions in this regard are taking place for the team's footballers.



photo: Al-Ahram

Win some lose some, Zamalek basketball league and cup winners

Clean bill of health

It's been confirmed: Egypt will host the 1999 World Handball Championship, reports **Inas Mazhar**

When Egypt signed on the dotted line last week, it effectively squashed rumours that it would not host the 16th World Handball Championship for men because of the massacre in Luxor.

Egypt will be the first African and Arab country to host the two-week event, the equivalent of football's World Cup. The country won the bid during a general assembly held in Atlanta during the Olympic Games in 1996. But following the 17 November massacre in Luxor, in which 58 foreign tourists were killed by terrorists, rumours started circulating that some countries had stated their intention not to play in the championship — scheduled for 1 to 16 June 1999 — for fear of terrorist acts in Egypt. They said Egypt lacked proper security precautions and that holding the championship in Cairo would be unsafe for the 24 participating teams. During the *women's world championship in Germany* last December, some countries demanded that the men's event be transferred to another venue and even threatened to boycott the tournament if it was staged in Egypt.

However, a high-powered delegation led by Erwin Lance, president of the International Handball Federation, IHF Secretary-General Raymond Hahn, Treasurer Rudi Glock and General Director Frank Birkefeld, in addition to IHF vice presidents, visited Egypt last week to check its facilities. During its three-day visit, the delegation visited Cairo, Ismailia and Port Said, inspecting stadiums and accommodations for players and officials, before giving Egypt the green light.

"Egypt has proved to be a very safe and secure country," Lance said. "What we have seen on our visit in the three venues — Cairo, Ismailia and Port Said — proves that Egypt has some of the best facilities in the world and that it is capable of successfully organising the World Cup as it did the juniors event in 1993," Lance added. "Signing the contract proves that the championship will take place in Egypt as scheduled and nothing will change that fact. It has also proven that all the rumours were wrong."

The signing ceremony, covered by local and international media, was held at the Mena House Hotel last Tuesday between Lance and Hassan Mustafa, president of the Egyptian Handball Federation. Attending the ceremony was Abdel-Moneim Emara, president of the executive board of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

World cup countdown

- MARC Overmars and Nicolas Anelka could wind up as rivals in the world cup. But the Dutch winger and the French striker teamed up last Saturday to shoot Arsenal to its second domestic triumph this year, adding the FA Cup to its premier league success after a 2-0 win at the home of English soccer. Overmars fired the gunners ahead of Newcastle after 23 *minutes and Anelka hit the second after 69* before 79,000 fans at Wembley.

- BENNI McCarthy says he is looking forward to South Africa's first round World Cup match with Denmark for personal reasons. "I will be playing against one of my childhood heroes, Peter Schmeichel ... and I will be looking for a good game," McCarthy was quoted as saying in Johannesburg's Saturday Star. Schmeichel, who plays for Manchester United in England, is considered one of the leading goalkeepers in the world.

In the interview, McCarthy, who plays for Ajax Amsterdam, looked back on his childhood in a poor, crime-plagued neighborhood in Cape Town, where he realised at a young age that soccer could be a ticket out.

"I can remember playing outside when suddenly there would be shooting, around 6 p.m. every night," McCarthy was quoted as saying. "It meant the end of whatever we were doing, as families locked themselves indoors."

He said his parents forced him to go to church Sunday mornings even if it meant missing a game. He once ran back after church to join a game in progress, and scored four late goals to save the day for his team. At one point, the family had only one pair of soccer shoes for McCarthy and his brother, Jerome, he said.

- VETERAN Spanish international goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta has confirmed the rumour that he will retire from Spanish soccer after this year's world cup in France. "The batteries are running out," Valencia's stalwart keeper said at a late night press conference on the Island of Tenerife. "That was my last match in the Spanish league" Zubizarreta said after his 622nd match in 16 years in the first division. Valencia lost to Tenerife 2-3.

Zubizarreta who travels to France with the Spanish squad for his fourth world cup appearance has already played 123 matches for the national team, and 152 matches for Valencia over the last four years. He appeared in 301 games for FC Barcelona between 1986 and 1994, and 169 for Athletic de Bilbac between 1981 and 1986.

Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri said Saturday that Zubizarreta was "the greatest" keeper he had worked with and a "leader in the dressing room."

- MEXICO, which had been dubbed "el tritanic" by its home media as a mocking jesture of the team's nickname "el tricolor", continued its world cup preparations Saturday with a 0-0 draw with Steaua Bucharest.

The game, played in Enzo Mariotti stadium, was the fourth of the Mexicans' Italian tour which has also included matches against *Bologna, the Estonian national team* and Venezia.






The Sphinx:

Ask not why

That Sphinx? Well, yes. The riddle itself

Writing about a statue is necessarily different — that is, more difficult — than about a human being. No clues can be gleaned from words, gestures, or pensive moments. Still, the Sphinx is not just any statue — not just a work of art, but a monument which has witnessed the rise and fall of entire civilisations. Hewn out of rock, it has sat at the foot of the Pyramids of Giza, amidst a sea of sand, for millennia. This mythical beast has the head of a man and the body of a lion. its features are those of King Khafre and it keeps *vigil over the necropolis.* The eyes do not look stony: they are full of ineffable knowledge, tempered by a faint, defiant smile. In Ancient Egyptian mythology, the Sphinx was a witness to the rising and setting of the sun, a witness to the continuous cycle of day and night.

The Sphinx appears in legends and myths, all over the world. It is known to travellers and poets, archaeologists and robbers raiding the ancient sites. The Sphinx, too, has suffered discrimination. It has not been counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, on an equal footing with the Great Pyramids of Giza and the Great Wall of China. Yet its share of world attention has never diminished. Is the Sphinx as old as the age in which it was built, as old as the day it was recovered from the desert sands, or as old as the history of humanity itself?

For more than four millennia, the Sphinx has watched the march of time. Greeks, Romans, Copts, Arabs and Turks came and went. The French under Napoleon were the first to sketch the Sphinx and to unravel the wonders of Ancient Egypt. Mohamed Ali, the reformer who modernised Egyptian life, was essentially a futurist, with little interest in antiquities. More recently, the Sphinx came under threat by the Pyramid Plateau Housing Project, a mammoth development *scheme opposed by intellectuals and large* swathes of the population alike. Well-founded alarm was voiced regarding the threat the project would pose to the priceless monuments in the Pyramids area, from drinking and drainage water seeping into the desert, from erosion, and pollution from human sources. Fortunately, the late president, Anwar El-Sadat, personally intervened to halt the project.

Silent for thousands of years, the Sphinx was not doomed to silence for ever. Today, it is part of a sound and light project. When night has fallen, the dark, still plateau comes back to life. Awash in bright stage lights, the desert *reverberates, echoing with the voices of kings,* queens, high priests, generals, soldiers and masses, shouting, whispering, cheering, riding to battle.

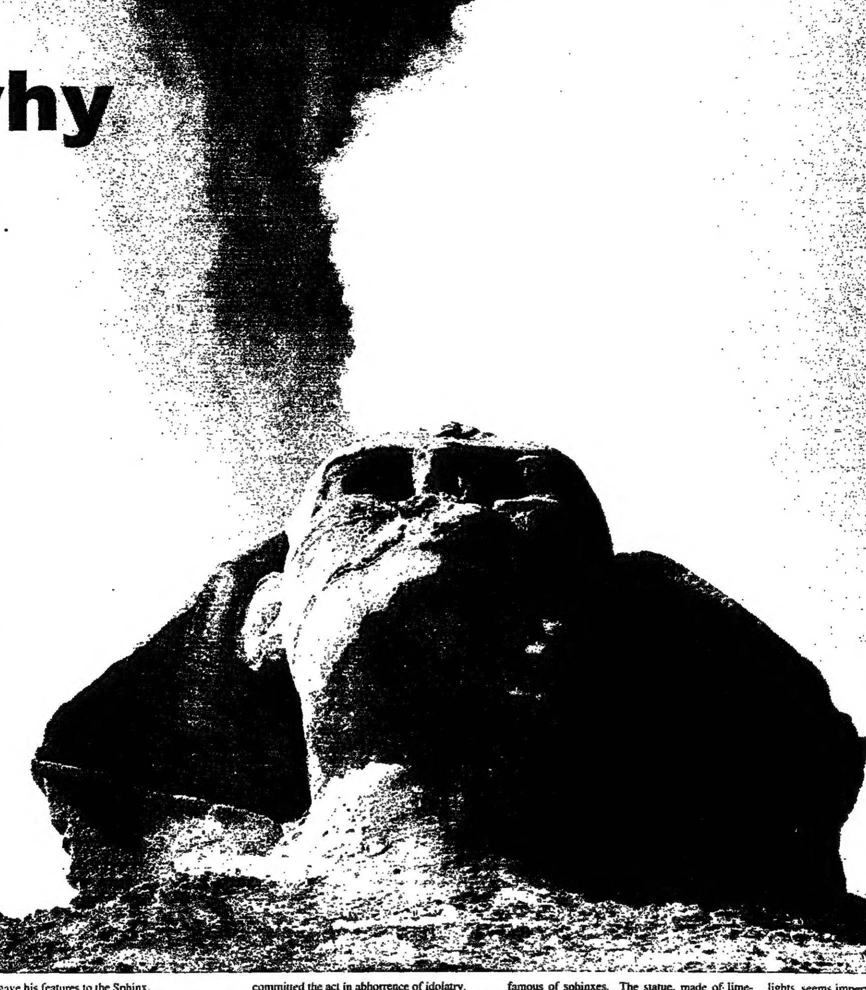
I decided that I would approach the Sphinx through the camera lens. I spent ten days with the photographer, observing and taking shots of the statue from all angles. Each photo revealed some new aspect of this enigmatic creature.

The papyri scattered throughout the museums of the world will reveal new facts about Egypt, Misraim or the Land of Kinana. Then, perhaps, the Sphinx's secrets will be revealed.

The Sphinx, today, is as bewildered as Ramses II. The two are ailing. The Pharaoh is to be moved from Ramses Square to some less polluted location. As for the Sphinx, it is being eroded by climate, pollution and human activity.

Since the beginning of this century, several teams have carried out restoration work on the huge beast. Did they do more harm than good? Today, the damage is being reversed. The unknown sculptor who carved the Sphinx millennia ago covered it with a layer of stone. The statue *could be suffering from an illness* as old as the rock from which it was carved. How old is that? Only the papyri know...

Sitting opposite Zahi Hawwas, director of the Giza plateau, I was struck by the resemblance. Hawwas said that legends, fantasies and research have proliferated. The Sphinx seems to exist to baffle mankind. In the heart of the enormous statue, five metres deep, is a 10 x 12-metre chamber. Hawwas says that the Cable News Network has focused on the restoration of the statue. CNN announced that the sphinx had recovered, and could once more guard the Pyramids of Giza, particularly the Pyramid of Khafre, the king who gave his features to the Sphinx.



President Mubarak will soon open the celebrations marking the completion of restoration work on the Sphinx. Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni has said Federico Mayor, the head of *UNESCO, will be* there, along with many other dignitaries and cultural luminaries. Eight years of work have been devoted to reversing damage done in previous restoration endeavours, during which inappropriate materials were introduced. A team of Egyptian engineers, archaeologists, meteorologists and geologists have worked together to bring this labour of love to fruition. A total of 12, 224 pieces of limestone were brought from 15 May City to repair the damage wreaked by wind, sand, pollution and misguided, if well-meaning, patching up. After careful experimentation, they were used in a daring salvage operation. The Sphinx is not invincible. But the dangers that it faced — from tomb raiders to erosion — have been overcome

At this point, the Sphinx intervened: "Some claim that I will soon be 4,600 years old. I am looking forward to celebrating the occasion, even if the candles on the birthday cake do not reflect the true number of my years! The first to sketch me came with the French Expedition, but I remember that by then, my beard had already been whisked away, and my nose broken."

I am presently looking at a picture of Gamal Mukhtar, late director of the Antiquities Department. I can hear him explaining the Sphinx.

"The idea emerged when a valley temple was built at the edge of the Nile, east of the Pyramids. *Here the high priests performed funerary* rites, after which the deceased was carried up the causeway to the mortuary temple prior to interment in the pyramid. It was essential, therefore, to build the Sphinx: human reason and sheer animal force would keep an ever-vigilant eye on the City of the Dead. The Sphinx guarded the necropolis, and was himself immune to death. Thus the Sphinx survived, by struggling against the hostile forces of nature, the environment and man."

Sayed Tawfiq, a former director of the Antiquities Department, who discovered 36 tombs in the district of Saqqara, writes: "The Sphinx is perched *near the funerary temple of* King Khafre at the eastern edge of the Plateau, facing east. The statue is part of the remains of the pyramids of King Khafre. In 1886, Maspero continued earlier excavations, removing earth from around the temple, and the Department of Antiquities completed the operation in *1926.* In *1936,* the clearing of sand and reconstruction works were finalised."

Although tradition has it that Napoleon's army broke the Sphinx's nose (which, like that of Cleopatra, certainly changed the course of history), the Mameluke chronicler Al-Maqrizi writes that a Sufi named Sa'im Al-Dahr, his *contemporary,* committed the act in abhorrence of idolatry.

In the New Kingdom (1567-1080BC), the Sphinx represented the sun-god Re-Harakhte, meaning "Horus of the horizon". He was regarded as the guardian of the necropolis, and a deity in his own right, with a congregation who flocked to worship at his feet on pilgrimage. In Egyptian mythology, the lion was the guardian of holy places. In a text of the 26th Dynasty (644-525BC), the following words are said to have come from the lips of the Sphinx: "I protect your tomb, guard your burial chamber and deter strangers..."

Sphinxes are intimately linked to Ancient Egypt. *There are two conflicting theories re*garding their origin. In Greek mythology, a winged lioness with a woman's head was a cruel being who spoke in riddles. The second legend identifies the sphinx with lion gods. In Egypt, it is usually represented as possessing the head of a pharaoh and the body of a lion. The common elements in the two legends gave rise to general confusion, and to the belief that the Greek name and the representation of the sphinx had been taken from Egypt through Syria. If valid, such a theory would simply imply that the sphinx left Egypt a docile deity, only to turn into a cruel monster in Greece. In Egyptian mythology, *however, the sphinx was never cruel: neither the* statues with a woman's head (representing queens) nor those with the head of a lion and the wings of a hawk. The sphinx has always been identified with kingship, unrelenting in the face of enemies, a king or the sun-god. Just as a lion, the Sphinx was invincible in quelling rebels and defending the righteous. A pharaoh would compare himself to a pride of lions protecting a temple. The pharaoh called *himself the twin brother* of the sphinx, describing the two of them as lions, the "guardians of the two horizons." The sphinx is at times represented as a god in the form of a lion, defending his pride. This concept is clearly manifested in the rows of sphinxes with ram heads on the path leading to the Temple of Karnak. Lions with ram heads are associated with Amun.

But the Sphinx in Giza is the largest and most famous of sphinxes. The statue, made of limestone, is over 70 metres high. It was built by Khafre to guard the western passage, where the sun and the dead disappear. When kings went hunting in the vast desert around the Sphinx, the events were recorded in mural engravings. On pitching its tents near the Sphinx, a Canaanite tribe took the statue for the god Hurun.

The Sphinx disappeared, buried in the sand, only to reappear once more, as majestic and awe-inspiring as ever. Observing its eyes and mouth, now, one can easily believe that the divine beauty of the face could have lasted, sand notwithstanding, had it not been for a mediaeval *prince who destroyed the "idol's smile" with gun*fire.

Hawwas explained the area encompassing the Pyramids and Nazlet Al-Simman was known in hieroglyphics as the "Land of Osiris, lord of the gate to the labyrinths of the underworld."

Egyptians were the first to meditate about the sky, the earth, water, light, the sun and moon. "Who created this universe?" Their constant questions were behind their creation of the oldest civilisation in human history.

The Pyramids are visited every year by millions. Some come for spiritual reasons: there are New Agers, and those for whom Akhnaten is the first *monotheist* and Thutmosis III the greatest military commander of all time. The rituals of their pilgrimage include a visit to the pyramids at sunrise and the chanting of hymns in the burial chambers inside the great Pyramid. At the foot of the Sphinx, they chant hymns of adoration. They believe in an afterlife, and in the cleansing effect of their pilgrimage to Egypt.

The Sphinx, illuminated in the *glare of the stage* lights, seems impervious to these strange goings-on.

Mukhtar El-Suweifi, a member of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, is a Sphinx fan. He follows current Sphinx events avidly, and enjoys rumours just as he does hard facts. The beard is due to return from London, he assures me... the Sphinx will look different after a costly and difficult operation. Our minister of culture has stated *that the Sphinx will last* another 5,000 years before erosion affects it again.

On the stele between the great beast's paws, a story is told: a prince, who had fallen asleep in the shade of the Sphinx, dreamed that the statue told him he would become the ruler of Egypt, if he cleared away the sand surrounding it. The prince kept his promise to the Sphinx, and became King Thutmosis IV.

A mortuary text speaks of two sphinxes, one for sunrise and another for sunset. The gods Shu and Tefnun were represented as two lions: symbols of strength.

Perhaps the sun-god Atun, with its scorching rays, is the protector of lions. The relation between lions and the fertility of the land may be manifested at the flood season: at the earliest signs of the flood, the lion appears in the sky, and the land bears fruit, its *fertility restored.* The lions could also be part of the sun's journey into the underworld after sunset. Lions, after all, are charged with watching over the eastern and western borders of Egypt.

The Sphinx whispers softly: "I was created by a genius, a master of cubism, impressionism, surrealism..." More than ever, this mysterious beast is an enigma which modern science will unravel — but which only legend can explain.

Profile by
Samir Sobhi